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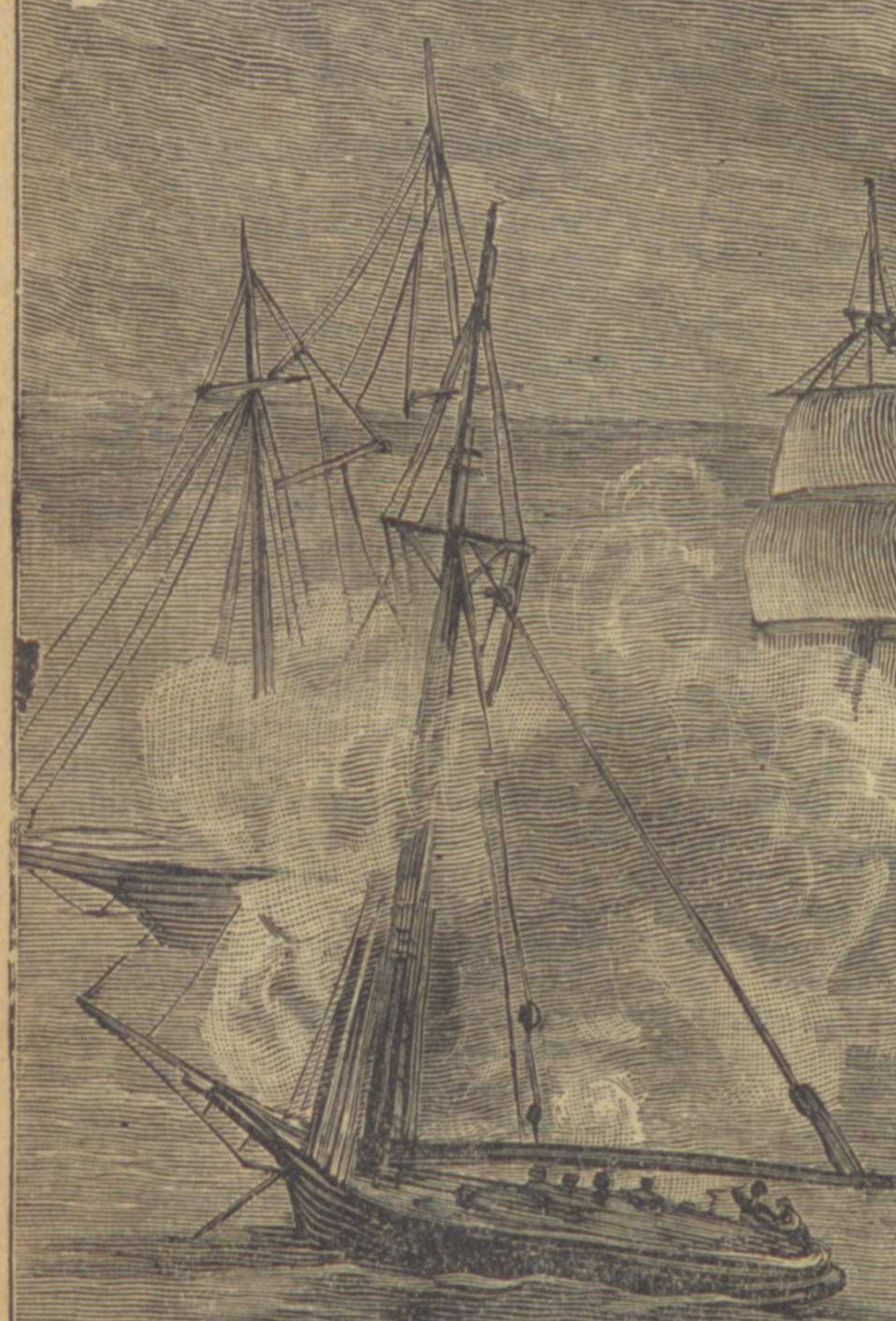
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THE HUNTED MIDSHIPMAN



OR, The Young Sea Ranger.

A Companion Story to "The
Royal Middy."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE FLYING
YANKEE," "A CABIN BOY'S LUCK,"
"THE SEA RAIDERS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE FUGITIVES.

NIGHT upon a rugged coast, a coast where desperate danger and death ever lurk for the bold mariner that ventures there without one who is skilled among those waters in finding a way for his vessel, and whose hand must stand ready ever to obey an iron nerve.

"CURSES ON THE MAN WHO HAS PILOTED THAT VESSEL-OF-WAR INTO THE COAST CORSAIR'S RETREAT!"

The Hunted Midshipman.

It is starlight, and the wind is light, the sea smooth, only the moaning of the breakers against the rocky islands breaking the silence of the scene.

Solitude that is impressive, and somberness that is weird rest upon all, and give to the pretty brig, gliding slowly in toward the shore, the appearance of a phantom craft.

No ripple leaves she in her wake, no creaking of blocks is heard, but with sails filled by the balmy breeze, she holds on her way into the very midst of the dread dangers that only a heart and hand of pluck can pilot her through.

A chain of islands, rocky, barren, except here and there a growth of pines, an open bay, then the mainland a mile away.

A bold iron-bound coast is this mainland, with projecting arms here and there forming a sheltered nook where a vessel can find safe anchorage, and tall cliffs rising up here and there with frowning front to dash back the savage waves when in their fury.

Within one of these sheltered havens are two vessels at anchor, dimly seen in the shadow of the overhanging cliffs and encircling, pine-clad hills.

It is toward this haven that the brig is shaping her course, and her stealthy way, of seeming to creep in, her showing no lights and the somber silence on board, would convey the idea that she is trying to surprise a foe.

The two vessels within the haven are a schooner and a sloop, the former of sixty tons, the latter of thirty, and both trim enough in build and rig to appear like pleasure-craft.

But a century ago pleasure-craft were seldom seen upon the American shores, and the war-vessel, or merchantman alone threaded the waters—no, not those alone, for the latter had a merciless foe, an untiring pursuer in the shape of the pirate, ever on the hunt for gold, or booty, even though it was stained with the blood of its defenders.

It was suggestive then, seeing those two little vessels lying at anchor in that secluded retreat, that they were not honest craft.

Not a light was visible upon them, and no soul paced their decks to keep watch and ward.

Quietly they rode at anchor under the shadows of the cliff, those who slept beneath little dreaming of that vessel outside slipping silently toward their haven of refuge.

Nearer and nearer came the brig, the peninsula was rounded, and the two little vessels were in full view from her decks.

A few moments passed, and then the quiet scene, the dense solitude was broken by stern commands, the shouts of combatants, the rattle of firearms, clashing of steel against steel and the groans of wounded men, with cries for mercy rising above the din.

The little haven was ablaze with the flashes of guns, and the scene was one resembling an Inferno.

At the first sound of attack, two men appeared upon the side of a cliff, forty feet above the water.

Behind them towered a wall of rock far in the air, and the shelf they were standing upon seemed but a resting-place in the high cliff.

Behind them was a cavern, the canvas covering drawn back and revealing a space within large enough to hold a hundred men.

A large lantern hung within, and its lurid light revealed that the cavern was a storage place, for booty of innumerable kinds was stored there, from casks of wine to bales of cloth and boxes of silk and laces.

On one side were two cot beds, and from these the two men had just sprung, aroused from their deep slumber by the din of warfare in the harbor below.

One was a young man, hardly over thirty, with a clean-shaven, bold face, strangely attractive, and wearing his brown hair falling in curls adown his back.

The other was a bearded-faced man of forty, wicked-looking, reckless and grim.

They were both evidently amazed at the attack, and the younger one cried in a deep, earnest tone:

"Curses on the man who has piloted that vessel-of-war into the Coast Corsair's retreat!"

"But, what is to be done, for the schooner and sloop are lost to us?" said the other.

"My vessels are taken, my crew are prisoners, and there is but one thing we can do," was the bitter reply.

"Fly?"

"Yes."

"You know a way of escape from here, other than by descending on the rigging of a vessel lying alongside the cliff, as we came up?"

"Yes."

"Then for Heaven's sake let us go, for they will run the brig alongside of the cliff soon, and we will be captured."

"No, we will escape—escape to become fugitives once more."

"But I will not go empty-handed, for there is rich booty here that we can take, and some gold."

"We will go prepared to live, to work, to plot for revenge, for I will be avenged, Carl Dent!" and the man spoke in a deadly earnest tone.

"Upon whom?"

"The one who brought that vessel in here this night, and those who have ruined me and made us fugitives."

"It is that boy that has done it."

"Mark Montague, the Royal Middy, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Who else can it be?"

"It is that middy, I'll wager life upon it, and he must be gotten rid of, if you expect to cruise on this coast for booty."

"Carl Dent, you hate the boy, and I admire him, though he has hit me some hard kicks; but I will have to check his career, as you say, if I expect to remain the Freebooter King of the Coast. But, come; we have no time to lose; let us be off."

They hastily gathered a few things, and taking the lantern, the younger man, known as Caspar, the Coast Corsair, led the way back through the cavern.

After a walk of a hundred yards through a narrow tunnel through the rock, they came out in the open air, through a crevice in a pile of rocks, situated in the midst of a dense pine thicket.

"Now, Carl Dent, we are safe," said Captain Caspar.

"And fugitives?"

"Yes, and I am thankful for that, for my men are either dead, wounded or prisoners, with the yard-arm staring them in the face, my vessels are prizes to the captor, whoever he may be, and my lucky thought that we should sleep in the cavern to-night, has saved our lives."

"I think we are most fortunate to be fugitives, Carl Dent," and the outlaw leader laughed as he led the way through the pines back into the rugged hill-land.

CHAPTER II. THE ROYAL MIDDY.

A PARTY of gentlemen sat together around a dining-table, in one of the grand old mansions of Boston a hundred years ago.

A sumptuous repast had been served, the negro servants in livery had been ordered to leave the room, and the diners settled themselves for a talk upon the topics and exciting themes of the day, for it was at a time just prior to the first blow of Americans for freedom from English tyranny.

There were six in the party, four of them in gorgeous uniforms, and two in the dress of civilians. A commodore of the British Navy sat at the head of the table, an admiral upon his right, a general upon his left.

One of the civilians sat at the foot of the table, with his companion in citizen's attire on his right and an officer wearing the uniform of a colonel of Hussars on his left.

Various topics had been touched upon, discussed and passed upon, for it seemed to be an official meeting over rich viands and the wine-cup, and then the commodore, who was naval commander of the ports of the then colony of Massachusetts, said:

"There is one matter, gentlemen, that I wish to seek your opinions upon."

"My lord, the admiral here, has expressed his views upon the subject very forcibly, but under existing circumstances, I deem it wise to hear what you have to say."

All were at once most attentive to the words of their host, and he continued:

"I refer to the career of that gallant youth, who, because he is an American, appointed in the King's Navy, has become known to the people as the Royal Middy."

"A most gallant youth indeed," said the general.

"And justly deserved the appointment of midshipman, as I understand his case," said one of the citizens, who was a judge.

"To explain wholly what I mean, gentlemen, I would like to tell you what I know of the boy, and you can judge fully of his right to hold a position which the admiral appointed him to, but which, it seems, has caused ill-feeling among many English-born subjects, and also caused American-born subjects to denounce him."

"His name is Mark Montague, and his father dwells upon the Kennebec River, below the town of Bath, in apparent poverty."

"It is said that his father is a French exile, or a deserter from the French Army, and, as an officer was in the British service under Arnold."

"On Arnold's march to Canada, by way of the Kennebec, this Exile, if such be he, was involved in a duel with an English officer."

"The duel was fought on the banks of the Kennebec, at the spot where the Exile now has his home, strange to say, and was fatal to the English officer, who was buried there."

"The Exile was very seriously wounded, and the army marching on, left him at the village tavern."

"He had money, paid for all he received, and when he recovered remained at the village, until he built the home on the river where now he dwells."

"Then he disappeared for quite a while, and returning, brought with him a bride, the mother of the Royal Middy."

"A stern, silent man, he answered no questions, told no stories of himself, and lived apart with his wife from the outer world, with only several negro servants."

"Then he purchased a trading schooner and began a sea career, going at times to the West Indies."

"It was by going with his father, while his sister remained at home with her mother, for the Exile has two children, that the Royal Middy learned to be a sailor."

"Two years ago, when but fifteen, I believe, Mark Montague was with his father on a cruise to the West Indies."

"Their crew was carried off by fever, and shipping other seamen, they got men who sought to seize the fine schooner and sell her to a pirate who had seen her in port."

"The lad heard their plot, and his father being laid up in the cabin, from having his leg badly broken in a storm, the brave young fellow, with the aid of a negro, and the skipper, fighting from his bed, beat back the mutineers."

"The faithful negro was also wounded, but the boy followed the mutineers on deck, and certain it is that he saved the schooner."

"But there was a calm at the time and a hurricane approaching, so, without a crew the schooner was helpless, dismasted and a wreck."

"One of the mutineers was left, it seems, for others were washed into the sea, and he and the lad launched the life-boat and placed the wounded skipper and negro in it, with provisions to last them."

"They were just in time, as the schooner sunk while they were near it."

"The life-boat was headed for Portland, but one night, when near shore, in a calm, the mutineer sought to kill the boy, and the others, but was forced to spring into the sea."

"The life-boat the boy brought safely to port, his father was taken home, along with the wounded negro, and the leg of the former had to be amputated."

"Thus made a cripple and with his vessel lost, the skipper turned to his boy for support, and the brave lad bought a handsome sloop pleasure craft, turned her into a packet, and began his career as a skipper, with the faithful negro, an old seaman and two lads for a crew."

"His vessel, the Sea-Cat, was coveted by that outlaw, Caspar, the Coast Corsair, and an attempt made to capture her, on one voyage when the lad carried a large sum of gold on board, sent to Judge Stanwood of Bath, whom you know, gentlemen."

"Caspar had never armed his vessel with a battery it seems, but carried fully fifty men, with muskets, and kept a six-pounder in the hold, to be hoisted on deck if needed."

"He gave chase to the Sea-Cat, which had been badly loaded, and was out of trim, so he caught up with her."

"But the brave lad had some boxes of muskets on board, for the fort in the Kennebec, broke them open, armed his crew and passengers, built a barrier across the stern, with the cargo, to protect them, and beat Caspar off."

"It was a gallant affair, for the lad went up into the crosstrees with a rifle, and drove the helmsman of the schooner to cover with his unerring aim."

"This defense of his ship should have gotten him a commission; but soon after he saved the king's cruiser, which brought our distinguished friend here, the admiral, over from England."

"Chased by a French frigate in a storm, and driven toward a lee shore, the English sloop-of-war would have had to strike her colors or go ashore."

"But the Sea-Cat, boldly putting out on

her voyage to Boston in the storm and darkness, saw the situation, and her young skipper ran up under the fire of the frigate, boarded the English vessel, at the risk of his life, and ran her into the river.

"For this my lord here gave him the berth of a middy."

"Then it was the gallant middy came to me with a plan to capture Caspar, the Corsair, which was to secretly arm his sloop at Portland, man her with soldiers from the fort there, and let the freebooter capture him."

"It turned out as he had predicted, for the outlaw schooner and crew were captured, though the chief escaped."

"Several days ago I received a letter from Major Gardiner, commanding the fort, to the effect that Caspar had seized the Sea-Cat, on her way out of the river, having gotten another crew, forged a letter from her young skipper, for the schooner then in his charge, and boldly run in and carried her off."

"The Royal Middy, after his appointment had placed the old seaman, his mate, in charge of his packet-sloop, so was not on board, and a lad escaping, went to his home and told him what Caspar had done, at the same time saying he heard him say he meant to cut out his schooner in Portland."

"The Royal Middy and the lad drove in all haste to Portland, to discover the sloop and schooner already at sea, Major Gardiner expecting no treachery, as was natural from the forged letter, which he sends me with his report."

"The Royal Middy at once found a merchant brig in port, begged two pieces of light artillery, with gunners, and two-score of marines from the major, and went in chase, carrying along a wounded pirate prisoner as a pilot to the secret retreat of Caspar, the Corsair."

"Such is the report, and I guarantee the lad's success, and if successful desire to place him in a position still higher than the one he now holds, only I know that it will cause much ill-feeling among the British officers, to see an American lad advanced, and the question comes up that he, the Royal Middy, will turn traitor, in case of war with the Colonies, and side with his people."

"Knowing his story, gentlemen, as you now do, I beg to ask your advice in the matter— Ah! What is this interruption?" and the commodore turned to a servant who had entered, though orders had been given that the party were not to be disturbed.

"Pardon, sah, but the Royal Middy, sah, is outside and begs an audience."

A murmur ran around the table, and the commodore cried:

"My word for it he has been successful."

"What do you say, gentlemen—shall I ask him in here?"

A general assent was given, and the servant retreated with orders to usher the Royal Middy into the presence of the six distinguished gentlemen.

CHAPTER III.

THE REWARD OF PLUCK.

THE one who entered the brilliantly lighted room, where the king's officers were seated, discussing their after-dinner wine, was a youth of perhaps eighteen.

His form was tall, upright as an Indian, his shoulders broad and his carriage one of both grace and dignity.

His face was bronzed by exposure to wind and sun, but it was withal a face to remember when once seen, so full of character was it.

Every feature was expressive of firmness, fearlessness and intelligence, while the mouth, set off by even rows of snowy teeth, implied a spirit to do and dare anything that man dare attempt.

The eyes were full of fire, yet with deep feeling in them, and they met the gaze of those whom he confronted steadily, and his manner was that of refined rearing and courteous in the extreme for one of his years.

His dress was that of a sailor lad, hardly better than would have been worn by a fisherman's son, though it was neat and well fitting.

He had ambition, though not vanity, for though having held a midshipman's rank for some little time, he had not yet splurged out gorgeously in his brass buttons, gold lace and sword.

The appearance of the youth created a most favorable impression among the four present who had not before seen him.

The admiral, whom he had rescued in the cruiser, and who had created him a midshipman in the royal navy, and the commodore,

under whose orders he would serve, were already his friends, and he had won their admiration.

The admiral, as a tribute of his esteem, and to honor true courage, set the example of rising as the youth entered, and graciously grasped his hand.

The commodore also greeted him most cordially and presented him to those who had not before met him.

With the air of a courtier he received the honor bestowed upon him, and taking the seat to which the commodore motioned him, said:

"I beg your pardon, Commodore Rutledge, for intruding upon you, when you have guests, but I had just returned and have an important report to make to you."

"I will call, sir, again."

"No, Midshipman Montague, your coming is no intrusion, while it carries out the old adage of speaking of one they are sure to appear, for we were discussing you when your name was announced."

"Pray let me know what report you have to make, for my guests are king's officers, in army, naval and civil life."

"Thank you, sir, for your courtesy."

"May I ask if you heard from Major Gardiner, the commander of the Portland fort?"

"I did, and was sorry to learn that your old enemy had so quickly recuperated his strength, as to seize your sloop, and also recapture his schooner, by his clever ruse."

"I have them back, sir, now in port," was the modest response, though the youth's eyes flashed with pride at being able to make the report.

Exclamations, that amounted almost to a cheer, greeted the announcement, while the admiral said with enthusiasm:

"Bravo, Master Montague! you are one among many."

Mark Montague bowed, while the commodore, when the murmurs ceased, said:

"Major Gardiner stated that you had secured a brig to go in chase, and there his report ended."

"Will you kindly let us know how you retook the vessels?"

"Certainly, sir, if you desire it now."

"Yes. I wish my honored guests to hear your report, Midshipman Montague," and as the good-hearted commodore spoke, he glanced around upon his guests with a look that plainly said:

"I told you so!"

"The vessels were out at sea when I reached the overlook above the city, and I knew that Caspar had gotten the schooner out by some clever trickery, so I went at once to the fort and learned how he had deceived Major Gardiner."

"There was no vessel-of-war in port, but a brig that was idle, and a fast sailer, but without a crew."

"Through Major Gardiner I secured the brig, picked up a crew of a dozen seamen, borrowing two pieces of light artillery, a dozen gunners, and forty marines from the fort set sail."

"It was twilight when I got out to sea, and the sloop and schooner were but mere specks down the coast, leagues away."

"Knowing that some of the pirates, wounded in Caspar's attempt to seize my sloop, were in the fort hospital, I selected one of them as a man whom I thought I could make useful, and sent him to the brig's cabin."

"He proved to be a strange young fellow, with honor, though a pirate, and would not betray his comrades."

"He knew not of the capture of the sloop and schooner by Caspar, whom he believed dead, or he would never have served as my pilot."

"He supposed he was only guiding me to the pirates' retreat, where a lot of booty was stored, and that the several men in charge could readily escape, upon seeing the brig coming."

"Upon this belief, when I threatened to swing him to the yard-arm if he refused, and to give him his freedom if he served me well, he consented."

"But what was your authority for giving him his freedom, Midshipman Montague?" asked one of the civilians.

"I was in command, sir, and therefore in authority, while I deemed that the life of one man, though a pirate, was not to stand in the way of recapturing those vessels, the crews on board, the cargo of my sloop, the booty on the schooner and the piratical stores at the retreat."

"Upon this I acted, sir, and pledged the man a pardon."

"You should not have acted without advice," urged the civilian.

"I act, sir, when in authority myself, with the expectation of being judged for my acts."

"When a superior is near at hand to seek advice of, I will gladly ask it; but if not, then I

must do as I deem best and bear the consequences, good or bad."

The civilian shook his head, for it was evident that he was one who went in a given groove: but he saw that he was alone in his opinion, and said no more.

Then the midshipman continued:

"Upon these conditions, Commodore Rutledge, the pirate captive agreed to act as pilot, and he skillfully ran the brig in by night, seated in a chair on deck, as he was weak from his wound and suffering, and we entered the cove of the pirates, which Caspar the Corsair has named 'Lost Souls' Harbor.'"

"A good name, surely," said the general.

"I had no lights showing, not a block creaked or sail flapped, and lowering two boats filled with marines, we boarded the sloop and the schooner at the same time, while the gunners on the brig stood ready to support us."

"The pirates were all below, suspecting no attack in a retreat where they had never before been found, and after a sharp, short fight, we captured them."

"I was sorry not to find the chief on board, but he and a comrade had slept up in the booty-cavern that night."

"You did not capture Caspar, then?" said the commodore.

"No, sir; for, alarmed by the attack, he escaped from the cavern into the hills with his companion, who is one Carl Dent, a man who was a mutineer on my father's schooner, and who, attempting to kill my father, self and negro one night, was foiled and sprung into the sea."

"Aha! that was the fellow, was it?"

"Yes, Commodore Rutledge, and he was the man who boarded my sloop in disguise as a passenger, and arranged the plan for Caspar to seize her, the time we turned the tables upon him."

"And these two men escaped?"

"Yes, sir; but we recaptured the sloop and schooner, secured a dozen boats belonging to the pirates, a vast quantity of booty, such as casks of wine, laces, velvets and silks, and have some forty prisoners, a dozen of whom are more or less seriously wounded."

"And your losses?"

"Two marines killed and nine wounded, one seriously."

"You have done nobly, Midshipman Montague."

"But where are the vessels?"

"In port, sir, with all the prisoners and booty on board."

"I arrived an hour ago."

Words of praise were freely bestowed upon the brave youth, after which the commodore said:

"Master Montague, in reward for your pluck, I will not order you on board a British cruiser as midshipman, as was my intention, when your thirty days' leave was up and you reported for duty, but instead, shall make you commander of that pirate schooner, the Shark."

She shall be fitted with a light battery, manned with forty seamen, and rigged out in the best trim, while your duties will be that of a coast guard, that is, protecting our coast trade of the Colony of Massachusetts from smugglers and freebooters, and at the same time trying to capture this slippery fellow Caspar.

"I will see that your sloop is returned to you for coasting trade, under your crew as before, and that the schooner's value as a prize, and the booty captured, is sold for the benefit of yourself and those with you."

"Kindly transfer the schooner, prisoners and booty to the captain of the port, and then, I suppose, you will sail in your sloop for home, to remain until your leave is up?"

"Yes, sir, I would like to do so, with your permission."

"Certainly," was the reply, and several days after the pretty sloop Sea-Cat set sail for the Kennebec, with her midshipman skipper on board, while the pirate prize, the schooner Shark, was hauled into the docks to be refitted and armed as a coast guard under command of her daring young commander, the Royal Middy, as the native Americans derisively called Mark Montague, for accepting service in the navy of the king.

CHAPTER IV.

SHARKS AHOY!

So great had the fame of the young skipper of the packet sloop Sea-Cat become that there was a demand for passage on his trim and comfortable little vessel to the ports of Portsmouth, Portland and the Kennebec River villages.

Mark Montague therefore found a larger num-

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ber of applicants for passage than he could accommodate.

He had, on his trip before, turned the command of the Sea-Cat over to his faithful mate, Buntline, an old coast sailor of three-score years, so he said to him on going on board:

"I will be skipper this cruise, Buntline, as it is my last chance, for I shall remain at home until ready to sail in the Shark, for I will have little time to see my parents and sister after my duties begin."

"I'm more than willing, Master Mark, to drop back to mate under you again, but when you do turn the Sea-Cat over to me, I will do my duty by you."

"I know that, my dear old friend, and the little packet will support those at home well."

"But I leave all in your hands, only I wish you would report to my father at each return home, and pay over the profits of the voyage."

"Of course you are to take out your own pay and that of the crew, with the running expenses; but the way we have been supported of late, if it continues, will give my people at home a handsome margin."

"No fear of that, sir, and a snug sum to lay by," answered the old seaman.

Then he added;

"Do you notice what a full passenger list we've got, sir?"

"Yes; more than we have accommodations for."

"Well, sir, they said they would go if they slept on the cabin floor, and paid well for the voyage, so I took them."

"How many in all?"

"There's nine gents, sir, and six ladies, and not one of 'em did I ever see afore."

"Buntline!"

"Yes, sir."

"You have Charcoal, Chips and three lads in crew?"

"Yes, sir."

"With you and I this makes seven?"

"Yes, sir."

"Nine o'clock is the hour you are to sail tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Buntline, see here," and the young skipper called the old mate apart, where no curious ears could hear what was said, and for some minutes the two talked together in a low tone.

Then Mark walked up into the town, and the cargo of the Sea-Cat was rapidly placed in the hold, for in a few more hours she would sail.

It was growing dark, and soon after the passengers began to arrive on the wharf, and were shown to their places on board by Charcoal, a gigantic negro, who was cook, steward and man-of-all-work on board the Sea-Cat.

His ally was a lad of sixteen, with a freckled face, cunning eyes and a most "knowing look" in general, and yet his countenance, at will, could assume an appearance of abject stupidity.

Chips was the name he answered to, but what other appellation he had no one knew.

He was cabin-boy of the Sea-Cat, and a good one.

He was also a thorough sailor for his years, and the word fear was not to be found in his vocabulary of knowledge.

Chips showed the female passengers their quarters on board the little packet, cheered them with the information that they would have a quick and quiet voyage, and told them the bill of fare that would be served for each meal, adding:

"Charcoal is the best cook on any of the packets. Cap'n Mark Montague hain't one to stint his passengers in feed."

When the hour came for sailing it was found that there were twenty passengers, instead of fifteen, several others having come down at the last minute.

But, as they said they would put up with what accommodations they could get, they were allowed to go.

There was a fresh breeze blowing, and the Sea-Cat, with a full cargo and crowded cabin went flying out of the harbor, her midshipman skipper and his crew at their posts.

The passengers were a quiet lot, and most of them seemed wholly unacquainted with each other, for there was little conversation going on among them.

The sea was not rough, and with the wind abeam, after she shaped her course down the coast, the Sea-Cat went bowing merrily along.

The passengers were grouped about on deck, with the exception of a few who were in the cabin, and all seemed too much impressed with the beauty of the night to converse, for silence rested upon deck.

Mark Montague had placed one of the sailor

lads at the tiller, and Buntline, Charcoal and Chips had "turned in" for a few hours' rest, as the old mate and the lad went on duty at midnight.

Going forward Mark Montague stooped down and half removed the hatch from the hold, remarking to one of the passengers who was near:

"I have some perishable goods in there that the fresh air will help, far better than the close atmosphere of the hold, and with this sea we can have the hatch open."

"Yes, there is no water coming upon deck now," answered the passenger, who was a man who had been attentively regarding the movements of the Royal Middy ever since he came on board.

Then suddenly he drew his hand from his breast, where he held it, and thrust a small pistol in the face of the young skipper, while he cried:

"You are my prisoner, Mark Montague!"

At the same moment he called out:

"Sharks ahoy! ahoy! show your teeth and seize the Sea-Cat!"

Mark Montague did not move at the words of the man.

Nor did he give utterance to a single word.

But, out of the cabin poured a number of the passengers, and they grouped themselves aft, one of them seizing the tiller, while the lad who was steering was grasped in strong arms and thrown down the companionway.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEA-CATS AND THE SHARKS.

FROM the instant of the drawing of a pistol, and leveling it in the face of the Royal Middy, to the rushing on deck of the passengers, and seizure of the young helmsman, had not been half a minute.

The man who covered Mark with his pistol, and who had given the cry of, "Sharks ahoy!" Now called out:

"Come, men, sweep away the crew and the sloop is ours!"

A cheer broke from the lips of those who had been passengers; but it was drowned by the rattle of firearms, and up from the hold came men whose presence had not been expected on board, and their weapons were turned upon the group assembled aft.

The man who had held Mark Montague under the muzzle of his pistol fell dead in his tracks, shot down by Chips, while Buntline, Charcoal and a dozen men came with a rush to the side of their gallant young skipper.

"Drive them into the sea, lads, but spare all who cry for quarter," shouted Mark, and they rushed after with a force that swept back those who would seize the sloop.

"Beat them back, hurl them into the sea, you devils, or every one of us hang for this night's work," came in a voice that rung out like one accustomed to command, and he threw off a woman's dress and bonnet as he spoke, while he leveled a pistol and shot dead one of the defenders of the Sea-Cat.

The men who had come out of the hold had brought pistols, muskets and cutlasses with them, and seizing a blade handed to him by one of his crew, Mark Montague sprung forward to the attack.

"Look out, Master Mark, that man is Caspar the Corsair," cried old Buntline, referring to the one who had stripped himself of the feminine disguise he had worn, and now appeared as leader of the pretended passengers.

But Mark was now face to face with him, and the cutlasses of the two came together with a clash.

"Have at you, my Royal Middy, if so you will, and I will teach you a lesson not to cross the blade of Caspar the Corsair," cried the leader of those who were striving to seize the sloop.

Mark made no reply, but pressed the pirate so hard that he was forced to give back, evidently to his amazement at the superb swordsmanship of the youth.

Finding that the middy held his own, the Corsair shouted to his men:

"Rush them overboard, men! Kill them! Show no mercy, for it is victory or the rope-end with us!"

But Mark at the same time moved a step nearer his adversary with the cutlass, his men crowded more closely around him, while Charcoal, with a clubbed musket drove the pirates back.

"Now, men! hurl them into the sea!" shouted Mark, and he struck up the cutlass of the Corsair and sprung toward him.

As he did so, the pirate tripped and fell, and the fight in an instant was ended, for cries of

quarter were heard, while a few, in utter frenzy sprang into the sea.

The sloop had come to, during the fight for mastery, and lay rolling upon the waters, for the helmsman among the attacking party had deserted the helm, or been killed.

It was a sad scene to gaze upon, for half a dozen men lay upon the deck dead, twice as many more were wounded, and few were there on both sides who had escaped without some injury.

The Corsair leader lay where he had fallen, a gash upon his head, and it seemed as though he was dying.

The Royal Middy bent over him an instant, and then had him borne, with the other seriously wounded, into the cabin, while the sloop was at once put back for Boston.

Among the prisoners was one whom Mark recognized, for he said to him:

"Well, Carl Dent, this is a red night's work for you."

"The devil is your patron saint, boy, for you always are successful," growled the man.

"I am on the side of right, Carl Dent, and justice should triumph; but I guess that your shipmate Caspar the Corsair's career is ended, and yours soon will be at the rope's-end."

"You have no right to hang me."

"Oh, yes, as a pirate."

"I am no pirate, for I shipped with Captain Caspar, not knowing what he meant to do."

"Carl Dent, you shipped in the West Indies on my father's schooner, and were one of the mutineers that tried to seize his vessel."

"You also tried to kill my father, Charcoal and myself, in the life-boat, and failing, sprung into the sea."

"I supposed you were dead, but you swam ashore, and leagued yourself with Caspar."

"You came on this very vessel disguised as an old man, as a passenger, and left us at Portsmouth, joined Caspar, and were with him in his attack on the Sea-Cat, when we caught the schooner instead of your capturing us."

"You and Caspar escaped, and you were with him when he captured this sloop in the Kennebec, and sailed in her to Portland, where you got the schooner Shark."

"I chased you to your retreat, and you and Caspar escaped, as you were sleeping in the cavern."

"You reached here very quickly, to rig up a crew as passengers, you, Caspar and others being disguised as women, and thought you had a sure thing of the sloop."

"But I surprised you, and going ashore rigged up five men as 'passengers,' and more, I put five more in the hold, arming all, so that when your fifteen expected an easy task in seizing the sloop from her crew of seven, and a few old passengers, you found seventeen defenders to face you."

"Now your chief is, I believe, dying, and thus will escape the gallows; but you will not, Carl Dent, for you deserve to hang, and Mark Montague called to Chips and told him to put irons on the prisoners, adding:

"You brought them for us, Carl Dent, and they are just what we need."

It was just before dawn when the Sea-Cat ran back to her wharf, having to beat into the harbor, and Mark went at once ashore to report his capture to Commodore Rutledge, of Caspar, the Corsair. Carl Dent his lieutenant, and nine other prisoners, for three of the pirates had been wounded.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ESCAPE.

MARK regretted to disturb the commodore, at such an early hour, but he had already been delayed in his voyage, and he was anxious to get off at once if possible for home.

The commodore was however, glad to be awakened with such pleasant news of the capture of the famous pirate, Caspar, and learning that Mark Montague had himself brought the news, he sent for the Royal Middy to come into his room.

"More fame you are winning, my lad, and no excuses are necessary for assuring me."

"While I dress, for I will go with you down to your sloop, tell me first what occurred, and how you captured the scamps?" said the commodore.

Mark told his story, how he had suspected his "passengers," and so engaged a crew to be on hand, if his suspicions proved correct, and the old officer was delighted at the strategy of the youth and said earnestly:

"You will be a king's captain, my lad, before you are twenty, at this rate."

"But what was your loss?"

"One of my lads, sir, was killed, and one of the extra crew I engaged, while half a dozen were wounded."

"And the pirates?"

"Three men killed, one has since died, seven were wounded, and I think Captain Caspar is dying."

"I am sorry for that, for he should hang."

"I gave him a cut on the head, with the point of my cutlass, though I did not think at the time that it was a severe wound."

"But he lies in a stupor, and seems utterly unable to move, or he is feigning it, may be."

"Hardly, I guess; but what would our distinguished friend, the judge, think regarding your defending your sloop without orders, for he was inclined to criticise you the other night rather severely."

"But come, I am ready now," and the two left the commodore's quarters together and after a brisk walk arrived in sight of the wharf, just as day was breaking.

That there was some cause of excitement on board the sloop, both saw as they neared it, for men were talking in loud voices as they approached.

As the middy, and the commodore in full uniform came up, a silence fell upon all, and Mark asked:

"Well, Buntline, what is this disturbance?"

"They've escaped, Master Mark," almost groaned the old seaman.

"Who have escaped?"

"The captain and the man you called Carl Dent?"

"What!" sternly cried the commodore.

"How did this happen, Buntline?" asked Mark.

"Well, sir, you know we thought the pirate captain was dying, for he lay like a man as had his death wound, and he was lying on the cabin floor, while near him was Carl Dent, his hands in irons.

The other prisoners were in the cabin too, along with the wounded, and one of our men stood guard in the companionway.

"Soon after you left, Master Mark, up rose the man Dent and he struck the guard full in the face with his ironed hands, cutting his head and knocking him down.

"Then out of the companionway he bounded and close on his heels was the dying Caspar, and overboard they both went.

"The other prisoners made a break, but we drove them back, but Caspar and Dent sunk from sight, and though we got our boats out, and rowed about the wharves, and under them, we have not been able to find them."

"The man in irons will sink, surely," said the commodore.

"No, sir, he swims like a fish, as does Caspar also, and they have escaped."

"This is too bad, for our work is all to do over again," Mark said, though he added:

"I do not blame you, Buntline, as Caspar seemed to be dying, and no one but Carl Dent would risk escape by swimming, with irons on his wrists."

"The next time you capture either of those men, Midshipman Montague, hang them at once without trial, and then there can be no mistake," said the commodore sternly.

"I will, sir," returned Mark, and the expression upon his face showed that he meant what he said.

Soon after a staff officer of the commodore arrived with a guard of marines, and the prisoners were placed in their keeping.

Then the gallant old officer gave orders that the harbor guard-boats should all begin a search for the escaped pirates, and congratulating Mark upon the successful defense of his sloop, bade him good-by and wished him *bon voyage*.

Half an hour after the Sea-Cat was again on her flight homeward, having this time no passengers on board to dread.

Crowding on full sail, Mark made the run as rapidly as it was possible to do, and arrived in safety at his destination, where his last gallant exploit had become known, through the arrival of the Boston stage, and added new laurels to his name.

CHAPTER VII.

THE home of Henri Montague, the father of my hero, was situated upon the banks of the romantic Kennebec, at a short distance below the town of Bath.

It was a substantially built structure of hewn logs, and the half-dozen rooms it contained were large and comfortable.

About it were several acres of cultivated land, some meadows and pine forests, with a large

barn, and upon all there was an appearance of thrift and coseyness.

Some fowls, a few sheep, some cows and an old horse constituted the live stock of the little farm, and in the little cove in front was a sailboat and several skiffs, and they had the appearance of being often in use.

Across the front of the house was a broad piazza, and from it a fine view up and down the river was visible, with the other shore and the hills beyond.

Upon the piazza, when the reader is shown the place, sat a man with one leg, and a pair of crutches lay by his chair.

He was a man of forty-five, well formed, with proud bearing and a face of resolution and courage commingled.

It was a face to command respect, and yet stand in certain awe of, for it had a stern look, and the eyes seemed to pierce one through and through.

A man of refinement he certainly was, and he smiled pleasantly as a lady came out of the door of the house and joined him, drawing a small rocking-chair up to his side.

A handsome woman she was, some years the junior of her husband and with the manners and look of one born and reared in luxury.

The man was Henri Montague, the one whom the neighbors called an exile, and the woman was his wife, she for whom he had built his house twenty years before and brought to that secluded spot to dwell.

Since the loss of his leg Captain Montague had not been able to do much work.

He was wont to go out daily on the river to fish, would sometimes drift along the banks and shoot game from his boat, and once each week was in the habit of going to the village for his mail and groceries needed for the household.

Polite ever to those who addressed him, he seldom spoke to any one unless they accosted him, and his whole pleasure seemed to be in his own home.

"They are not in sight yet, husband," said Mrs. Montague, as she took a seat by the side of her husband.

"No, but they soon will be, or perhaps they may come by the road, and leave their boat at the sloop."

"No, I think not, for Allene sprung into the boat just as she was, in her work dress, and would hardly go ashore.

"She will bring Mark back by the skiff— Ah! there they come now, and I will go down to the shore to meet them."

"And so will I."

She handed him his crutches, and the two moved slowly down to the little wharf jutting out in the cove, a hundred yards from the house.

"Our boy is winning fame rapidly, wife," said the captain with a proud smile.

"Yes, Henri, he is indeed; but I hope he will not remain in the English service should war be declared between Great Britain and the Colonies."

"He will not, I am sure, and yet I do not think they would willingly give him up; but here comes old Abram and Chloe, for they see their son Charcoal in the boat with our children."

"Children! how strange the name seems, for Allene is nineteen now, and Mark a hero and naval officer.

"I can hardly realize that twenty long years have gone by, since you brought me here, Henri, so happy has been my life with you."

As the loving wife spoke, down the hillside came the old negro couple, Abram and Chloe, the parents of Charcoal, and a moment after the skiff ran alongside of the wharf and its three occupants sprung out.

Charcoal was looked upon by his parents as a hero too, and they welcomed him accordingly, while Mark said:

"I can tell you both that but for Coal I think the sloop would have been taken this time; but he clubbed a musket and smashed pirate heads right and left."

"And Marse Mark were not lazy 'bout that time nuther massa and missy, for he show dat bad man, Caspar, dat he know suthin' about handle a sword too," said Charcoal.

"Why, brother, I believe that you and Coal have arranged to sound each other's praises," remarked Allene, a beautiful girl, with great large, dreamy eyes, a superb figure and a grace and loveliness one would not have expected to find in a maid of the Kennebec.

She was bronzed in complexion it is true, for she was a sailor and huntress, and sailed the river and hunted through the forests at will; but then she was a lady too, and she could cook too, while her embroidery was something to re-

member, and she could sing in a voice that touched one's heart, while she accompanied herself upon the linnet.

In fact Allene Montague was a strange, beautiful creature, and though all the youths in Bath were wild about her, she shunned society, and it was said cared for none.

In fact visitors were never welcome in the home of Montague the Exile, for the family seemed to be happy within themselves.

It is true that one young man had found a welcome there, and he too a sad profligate.

The son of a rich man, Judge Merton Stanwood, the young man, named after his father, had entered the King's Navy with honor and left it in dishonor, through some mad escapade.

Returning home he had become dissipated, gambled, and the associate of a low set had gotten into many a scrape.

One day while crossing the river alone in her skiff, a furious squall had capsized Allene Montague, and, but for the courage of Merton Stanwood, who went to her rescue, she would have been drowned.

Of course the young man was welcomed at the Exile's home, when he called, and yet he was not encouraged in his visits.

Between him and Mark there was no love lost, for they had had cause for quarrel, and the middy had punished the young profligate, though he was five or six years his senior.

When Merton Stanwood had saved Allene's life, Mark frankly sought to bury the hatchet between them, and yet he could not but feel that the friendship of the man for him was feigned.

It was said that Stanwood was jealous of Mark, and angry, because he had bought the Sea-Cat, a yacht Judge Stanwood had had built for his son, hoping to reform him, and then had not allowed him to have.

He was also envious of Mark's winning fame as he did; but he professed friendship, and the young middy so accepted it.

After saving the life of Allene Montague, Merton Stanwood's wild life underwent a change, and it was said that he was reforming.

Many hoped that his reformation was in earnest, but those that knew him best shook their heads; but there was one who believed in his honesty, and that was his beautiful young sister Lola, a miss of thirteen, who idolized her handsome, but wild brother.

Allene Montague also hoped that he was honest in his reformation, for one day he had met her, after saving her life, and said to her:

"I am going to change my life, give up my wild ways and win you."

"Remember, you are to be my wife some day."

This was a wild way of wooing, and it fairly startled Allene; but then she liked his audacity, and the man who had saved her from death she could not be indifferent to.

Thus matters stood at the time that Mark Montague came home in the sloop, to spend his short leave with his parents and sister, before going to take command of the Shark as a coast guard.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO PIRATES.

As the reader has doubtless surmised, the wounded Corsair Captain was not severely hurt.

He had felt the point of Mark's cutlass, with sufficient force to partially daze him, and he had slipped and fallen to the deck.

He was as cunning as he was brave, and he knew that the fight had gone against him.

Instantly he relaxed his muscles, and lay like one in a stupor, or dying.

There was no one on the sloop to examine his wound, and it was not suspected that he was "playing 'possum."

He was taken into the cabin, and when Carl Dent came and bent over him he was somewhat startled to get a wink from the chief.

Was it real, or only a contraction of the eye-lid?

No, it was real, and bending over he heard the words:

"We are going back to Boston?"

"Yes," whispered Carl Dent.

"We will arrive before dawn?"

"We should."

"Keep near me and be ready."

"For what?"

"A spring overboard."

"When?"

"When we reach the wharf."

"I see."

"You can swim with your irons?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then be ready."

Carl Dent nodded, and thus it was arranged between them.

They heard Mark leave the sloop, after it was made fast to the wharf, and this was in their favor.

Then they watched their chance, and suddenly Carl Dent said:

"Now!"

As he spoke he sprung upon the guard, dealt him a blow in his face with his manacles, and the two men dashed up the companionway over his fallen form.

A bound from the deck and they were in the water.

They sprung together, dove deep, the Corsair Captain with his grasp upon the shoulder of his comrade, and they rose far off from the sloop.

When the alarm was given search was at once made for them, and boats were lowered.

But no one suspected a badly wounded man, as Caspar was supposed to be, and a man in irons, to be running away from the shore.

But this the two bold fugitives did, for they were superb swimmers and they headed out into the harbor.

Arriving some distance off they began to swim along parallel with the town, and soon after headed inshore considerable distance above where the Sea-Cat lay at the wharf, for the tide had borne them swiftly along. Resting his hands on the shoulders of the Corsair Captain, Carl Dent had thus gotten along nicely, and yet it was no easy task for either.

At last they reached the shore, and both were greatly exhausted.

"Come, we will go to Forecastle Inn," said Caspar, and they rapidly sped along in the early dawn, not a soul being seen stirring upon the streets.

A walk of several blocks brought them to a dingy old stone house, large and crumbling, situated near the water's edge.

Over the heavy, nail-studded door hung a sign that read:

"FORECASTLE INN.
GOOD GROG AND GOOD CHEER
FOR ALL."

A peculiar knock upon the door, given by Casper, caused a slide soon to open and a head appeared therein.

"Who are you?" asked a gruff voice.

"Sharks!"

"All right."

After this brief parley a bolt was removed from within and the door was opened.

"Ho, cap'n, it's you!"

"Yes, Mainbrace."

"And you've had luck?"

"Yes, for we've saved our lives."

"It didn't work then?"

"No."

"Too many passengers?"

"No, the cursed boy suspected us, or there is a traitor in our camp who told him, and he had a human cargo in the hold."

"See, I am wounded here, and he has marked my handsome face for life with his cutlass."

"Then, you see, my friend Dent has bracelets on, so why need I say more?"

"We'll go to my old quarters, Mainbrace, and room together; but we need food, a file, and somebody that can take a few stitches in this wound on my head."

"I can do that, as I'm something of a leech myself, and I'll file off the bracelets, too, while my daughter Hettie will soon prepare you some food."

"Come, hunt your quarters quick, as you may be pursued."

"No danger of that, as water leaves no track; but still I am ready to get rest."

The landlord led the way through various halls to a small but comfortable room, and lighting a taper for them, he said:

"You'll be safe here, and comfortable, too."

"Now I'll rouse Hettie to get you some breakfast, and I'll get from her a needle and thread to draw that wound together."

"It's an ugly cut, captain, and was well-nigh a fatal one."

"Curse the boy, I'll not forget him for spoiling my good looks."

"It hasn't destroyed your looks, for a curl trained to hang over the scar will hide it."

"I'll soon return, and bring a file also, Mr. Dent."

In a few minutes the landlord returned and the wound was first sewn up and dressed, after which with a file the manacles were removed from the wrists of Carl Dent.

In the mean time, Captain Caspar told of his defeat, and added:

"Now, Mainbrace, you know I am not one to give up, so I want you to find out what the sloop is to do, where that Royal Middy goes, how long before my schooner is fitted out for sea and armed, and then get me a crew, ready to fight Satan if need be, and to be ready to do it at a moment's notice."

"I'll do it all for you, Captain Caspar; but don't be in too big a hurry."

"Fever may follow your wound, so lie quiet for a few days and rest," and the landlord left the room to soon return with a good breakfast for the two pirates, and to tell them that the whole town was aroused and searching for them.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ATTACK.

ALTHOUGH Mark Montague had many friends he was not devoid of foes.

There were many who envied him the fame he had won, and his father and mother, holding aloof as they did from all social intercourse with the neighbors, imbibited a number of the people toward them.

There were rich folks, too, who thought that Mark had simply usurped the place that their sons should have had, and patriotic toward the colonies, they condemned the middy for accepting a commission under a king, whom they regarded as a tyrant.

What was said and thought, neither Mark or his father cared much, though Mrs. Montague and Allene felt that they would have preferred that they should have no foes.

One wealthy old merchant, Reuben Patterson by name, was particularly bitter in his denunciation of Mark and all connected with him.

He had been a passenger on the Sea-Cat, when Mark had risked his little vessel to run to the aid of the cruiser, on board which had been the admiral, referred to in the opening chapters in this story, and who had created the youth as Royal Middy.

Mr. Patterson, looking to his own safety, had attempted to usurp authority on the Sea-Cat, endeavoring to prevent Mark from going to the rescue of the cruiser, as a pilot, and to raise a feeling among the other passengers that would compel the youthful skipper to obey them.

But Mark had promptly nipped this in the bud, by putting Merchant Patterson in irons, and confining him to the cabin until after he had piloted the British vessel to a safe anchorage.

Mr. Patterson had vowed revenge, and since that event, when he had been so unjustly treated as he said, he had never ceased to speak against the young sailor on all occasions.

The result was that Mark found a great many cold glances bestowed upon him, when he visited the village.

Going to Bath one morning, to make some purchases for his mother, Mark was passing the Sailors' Delight Tavern, when he espied quite a group standing there, watching his approach, and evidently making him the subject of their conversation.

He noticed at a glance that they were some of the wild young fellows of the town, those who felt that it should have fallen to their lot, and not his, to win fame.

Among them, too, though standing apart, he observed Merton Stanwood, talking with Walter Patterson, the latter a son of the merchant whom he had placed in irons on board the Sea-Cat.

Walter was twenty years of age, and had been off at sea the past two years, as mate of one of his father's vessels trading in foreign waters, and had only lately returned home.

Naturally he would not feel very kindly toward Mark, and so the latter was not surprised to see him slip out of the group and call to him:

"Well, Master Walter, you are back again from foreign parts, I see," said Mark, willing to be friendly, if his former schoolmate would be.

"I am back again, Mark Montague, and I intend to punish you for the insults heaped upon my father, an old man," was the reply.

"Your father is about fifty, I believe, and therefore old enough to know better than to do what he did, while you, as an officer, Walter, cannot but admit that no one has a right to interfere with the skipper of a vessel in the discharge of his duties."

Mark spoke quietly, and his words reached every ear, carrying conviction of their justice; but Walter Patterson had said that he meant to take up his father's quarrel, and, having been joining his friends in a few glasses of grog, upon his return, he was in a humor for a quarrel.

So he said:

"I told you I would punish you, and I will, if you are a king's officer."

"There!"

But the blow he aimed never reached Mark's face, for it was caught most cleverly on his arm, while Walter Patterson found himself flying backward into the arms of his friends, his nose bleeding and lip cut from contact with a small, but ironlike fist.

A murmur of surprise arose, and voices cried:

"At him, Walter!"

"He deserves it!"

"Knife him!"

Walter Patterson was livid with rage, and rallying quickly, he rushed upon Mark in a frenzy; but he was felled to the ground half stunned, while his adversary said:

"I am no street brawler, Walter Patterson, so if you have cause of quarrel with me, settle it elsewhere."

Then Walter Patterson, taught a lesson by his quick punishment, called out:

"A five-pound note to the lad who whips him!"

Several sprung forward, eager to risk a thrashing to get a five-pound note, while others, with a love of fair play, called out:

"Shame!"

Mark, however, stood his ground, and was ready to meet his foe, or foes, but suddenly a form glided in between him and the wild bullies who were rushing upon them.

It was a perfect vision of childish loveliness, little Lola Stanwood, thirteen years of age only, but now looking the woman in her just indignation.

"For shame! for shame! you cowards, to attack Master Mark as you are doing!"

The crowd shrunk back, while Merton Stanwood, angry at the interference of his sister, sprung forward from his listless attitude by a tree, and said, sternly:

"Lola, come with me, for you are wrong in doing this."

"I will not leave here until Master Mark does, for these bullies will kill him; and I am ashamed of you, brother, with your boasted love of fair play, that you allow half a dozen cowards to attack one you call your friend, and whom one dare not fight singly."

Her words rang out with a spirit that caused the crowd to shrink back before her angry eyes.

But Merton Stanwood said:

"Lola, don't make a scene, but come with me at once."

"Not until Master Mark does."

"I will go with you, Miss Lola, with pleasure, for my tarrying here was not of my own choice, I assure you, and I have to thank you for your kind interference in my behalf."

And Mark raised his cap politely, while the crowd quickly dispersed, as Judge Stanwood, a terror to all evil-doers except his son, was seen approaching.

In a few words Lola told him what she had heard and seen, from a little store near where he had left her to make some purchases, and he said sternly to his son:

"I am surprised that you should not have sided with Mark, sir."

"I have nothing to do with Montague's quarrels, nor was I interested in them; but I am surprised and pained that Lola made a little fool of herself."

"Silence, sir! Your sister Lola has done that which I honor her for."

"Master Mark, allow me to congratulate you on your rapid advancement as a sailor, and I predict well of you in the future."

"When do you assume command of the coast-guard schooner, which advices from Boston tell me you are to have?"

"In about two weeks, sir."

"You must be careful to keep a watch for Caspar the Corsair and his lieutenant, who escaped you, for they are desperate men and cunning as foxes."

"But dine with me at Rock Hill Mansion on next Monday, for I desire to talk over some matters with you, if you please."

"Thank you, Judge Stanwood, but I must decline your hospitality, though I will call upon you with pleasure, sir, on the day you name."

"Miss Lola, I thank you again for your goodness in coming to my aid," and raising his cap, Mark walked away.

A moment Merton Stanwood stood talking to his father and sister, and then they went off on their way homeward, while the young profiteer, with an angry face, at his father's words to him, walked into the tavern and joined Walter Patterson and several of his sympathetic companions.

CHAPTER X.

A KISS AND A BLOW.

THE little group that Merton Stanwood joined was a wild set of youths, about as bad a lot as there were in the town.

There were four of them, boon comrades of Walter Patterson, and when Merton Stanwood walked up they were discussing Mark Montague.

"He hits a terrific blow, I can tell you," said Walter Patterson, caressing his swelled forehead and bleeding nose and lip.

"Yes, he is a dangerous youth to attack with fists, Walter."

"Pistols or swords are the only things to get the best of him with," quickly remarked Merton Stanwood.

"If I thought he would dare to meet me I would call him out," said Walter Patterson.

"He would not dare do it," said Merton Stanwood.

"You think he would retreat behind his rank as a king's officer, Mert?"

"I am sure of it, Walter."

"I have a great mind to see if he will meet me."

"You certainly cannot allow his punishment of you to go unpunished."

"No, he's downed you," said one.

"He'll boast of it," another remarked.

"You've got to meet him," chimed in a third.

"But if he refuses?" asked Walter Patterson.

"Then you have your revenge, for you can post him as a coward," Merton Stanwood said.

"Will you challenge him for me, Mert?"

"Oh, yes, if you wish it, though of course I am friendly with him."

"Well, challenge him to meet me to-night, for it is moonlight, upon the river-bank opposite, at Snow Rock, with pistols."

"I'll do it, and at what hour?"

"Say midnight."

"Very well; but he, as the challenged party, may demand choice of time, place and weapons."

"Very well, but challenge him as I said, and I guess he will refuse."

So it was arranged, and soon after Merton Stanwood went out to seek Mark Montague.

He was very sure that he was still in town, but he did not look for him there.

On the contrary he took the road leading down to the Exile's home on the river.

It was early in the afternoon, and he hoped to find Allene strolling about in the neighborhood of her home, gathering wildflowers, as was often her wont.

He was not disappointed, for from the roadside he espied her upon a high point of rocks on the farm, known as "Lookout Castle."

She saw him approach, and her face flushed.

Then she seemed as though about to retreat, but stood her ground at last, and waited for him to join her.

He raised his hat in an abrupt, off-hand way natural to him, and said:

"Is Mark at the house, Miss Allene?"

"No, he has gone into town, and I am surprised you did not see him."

"I did not look for him, as I wanted to see you."

"To see me?"

"So I said."

Her face paled and flushed by turns, and at last she faltered:

"What can you wish with me, Master Stanwood?"

"Allene Montague, I love you, and I want to tell you so," came the abrupt words.

"Oh, Master Stanwood! don't talk so to me."

"Why not?"

"I must not listen to such words from you."

"Do you listen to words of love from others?" he asked sharply.

"No, from no one."

"I saved your life."

"Ah! well I know that, and each night I say a prayer for you."

"I do not want your prayers, but your love."

"I am but a poor girl, a nobody, and you are the son of an aristocrat and man of wealth and power."

"Such should never mate."

"I'll be the judge of that, Allene Montague, and you are to be my wife."

"I cannot."

"You hate me?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you love me?"

She was silent, and he repeated the question:

"Do you love me, girl?"

"Do not ask me."

"That means yes."

"I do not know."

"You will not say you love me, you do say you do not hate me, so I ask no more."

"Pray leave me, Master Stanwood."

"You fear to be seen here with me?"

"Yes."

"Your father hates me?"

"He could not hate one who saved my life."

"He does not like me."

"He does not admire your wild ways."

"And your mother?"

"Nor does she like your wicked life."

"I have given that up, since—"

"Since when?"

"Since I met you."

"I fear not."

"I have; but I have to contend against your brother, for he hates me."

"Mark does not admire you, I admit, and I am sure you do not like him."

"I do not care for him one way or the other."

"Will you not leave me now, for Mark would be angry to see me here with you."

"You fear him?"

"Oh no, for I do no wrong, though I do not wish to anger him."

"You are older than he is."

"Yes, but Mark is not like a youth, he is a man."

"Bah! his head has been turned because accident has helped him into a berth in the royal navy."

"No, his head has not been turned in the least, and his pluck and skill, not accident made him a Royal Middy."

"We will not argue the point, nor do I care to talk of him."

"You are to be my wife, and I came here to tell you so."

"If your parents refuse, it makes no difference, for I am to wed you, by fair means if so you wish it, by foul means if you do not care to have it otherwise."

"I love you, and no other man shall have you, so understand that you are to be my wife, and I will give you three months' notice of when, for just now I am unable to see ahead clearly."

"Good by, Allene, and I seal our compact with a kiss, though I have to force you to take it."

He seized her as he spoke in his strong arm, ere she was aware, and was, in spite of her struggles, about to kiss her lips, when he received a stinging blow in the face that sent him reeling ten feet away.

"Master Stanwood, to kiss a maid by force is an insult, and I have punished you for it as you deserve," said Mark, who had suddenly appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOUBLE CHALLENGE.

THE blow that Merton Stanwood had received had been upon the temple, and it was dealt in no light manner.

For a moment it seemed that Stanwood was dead, for he lay motionless, and Allene cried piteously.

"Mark you have killed him! you have killed him!"

"No, he is merely stunned," was the cool reply.

As Mark spoke the young profligate arose to his feet, his face white with passion.

"You shall rue this, boy, to your dying day," he hissed forth.

"Master Stanwood, let us understand each other."

"I know that you dislike me, and you may love my sister; but we have met before, you and I, and there is no love lost between us, as I know full well."

"I have punished you before, much as I have just now done, and a truce was patched up between us, while I was content to be friendly, as Allene owes her life to your courage."

"But I have known that you have dogged her steps, and have met her before, against the wishes of our parents."

"My sister feels kindly toward you, as her rescuer, nay, may love you in her secret heart, but she does not know how black your life has been and is."

"I did not play the sneak upon you here, but saw my sister, from where she stood, as I passed along the river path, and so came up to the rocks, and just in time to prevent you taking a kiss by force that she would not grant you."

"Now, Master Stanwood, I am not my sister's guardian, and I say frankly, if she loves you, and you prove yourself a man, and really are sincere in your feeling toward her, I will not utter one word against you."

"But mark well my words, sir, for I mean them, and I warn you, that if you attempt to

trifle with her, and continue your evil life, there shall be no doubt in your mind as to what I shall do in the matter.

"Now, sir, I will leave you to go your way and decide what it shall be in the future between us, peace or war."

Merton Stanwood had stood like a statue, and Allene had also remained motionless, while Mark spoke.

Then the former said:

"I came here to seek you, Master Montague, having a message of importance for you, and I sought also, I admit, to meet your sister, whom I frankly confess that I love."

"If she will not retire, I will inform you of the message I bear."

"But you will not press this quarrel with my brother?" urged Allene.

"Oh, no, there will be no trouble now, I assure you, madam."

"Then I will depart; but Mark, come home soon, will you not?" said Allene, as she turned away.

"Yes, sis, in a few minutes."

For a moment the two young men stood in silence, after the departure of the maiden, and then Merton Stanwood said:

"My coming here, Montague, was to bear a challenge to you from Walter Patterson, so we will discuss that first."

Mark did not change countenance, and simply said:

"What is the wish of Walter Patterson?"

"That you fight him."

"Was he not satisfied with our meeting a short while ago?"

"He does not mean to fight as a loafer!"

"Ah! then he should not have attacked me as such, for I punished him as he deserved."

"He means that you are to meet as gentlemen."

"When, how and where?"

"He desires you to meet him at midnight tonight, across the river at Snow Rock, and with pistols at ten paces."

"He authorizes you to challenge me?"

"Yes."

"Then, as the challenged party, I have some rights."

"Of course."

"Then I will not fight by night, as my going would alarm my mother and sister, and I will say to-morrow afternoon, an hour before sunset, on the shore of Star Cove below here."

"With pistols?"

"No, for I do not wish to kill an old school chum, as Walter was of mine, nor do I expect to give him a chance to shoot me."

"I select swords as the weapons."

"Good-evening, Master Stanwood."

"One minute, please?"

"Well, sir?"

"I desire to offer you a second challenge!"

"Who now?" and Mark smiled.

"Do you expect me to permit your blow to go unpunished?"

"I wish you would, under the circumstances that you saved my sister's life."

"I'll beg pardon humbly, if you wish it," was the frank response.

"No, you must meet me."

"If you demand it, yes."

"After the duel with Patterson."

"If I survive, of course," and Mark again smiled.

"Yes."

"Well, same weapons and place."

"Will they suit?"

"Yes."

"Then our interview ends."

"Who will be your second?"

"He will accompany me of course, for as you can but know, I have asked no one yet."

"Very well, we will be there promptly."

"I will not keep you waiting, Master Stanwood," was the reply, and Mark picked up the bundles he had been carrying, and walked homeward, while Merton Stanwood started off at a brisk pace back to town.

"Don't speak of what has happened, Mark?" said Allene, waylaying him on the way to the house.

"No, Allene, it is our secret; but heed my warning to beware of that man," was the reply of the young middy.

of superior make, and which belonged to his father.

The pistols, it was said, were the ones used in the duel of Captain Montague with his brother officer, whom he had killed, and by whom he had been wounded so seriously.

"Father, will you go for a row on the river with me?" asked Mark, going up to the house, where Captain Montague sat in his easy-chair upon the piazza.

"Yes, my son, with pleasure," was the response, and seizing his crutches the captain slowly made his way down to the little wharf and entered the boat.

Mark seized the oars and pulled out into the river.

Then he said quietly:

"I have gotten into a little trouble, and I come to you, sir, to ask you to help me out."

"There is no one you should look to before me, Mark, and I will do all I can for you."

"What is it, my boy?"

"Well, sir, I find there is a great deal of envy felt against me, and Walter Patterson, who is now at home, sought to punish me for my action toward his father, which you know of."

"He chose a time when he was surrounded by his mates, and as it did not result to his satisfaction, he seeks a different kind of meeting with me," and Mark went on to tell the story of the attack upon him, and how it ended, with Lola Stanwood's coming to his defense.

Then he told of the challenge, and, to shield Allene, said:

"Now, Merton Stanwood is not my friend, and I punished his insolence with a blow, and he also challenges me to meet him."

"This is bad, indeed, my son," said Captain Montague, seriously, and his face clouded, while he seemed to be looking back into the past, for he glanced toward the spot on the river-bank, where a headstone marked the grave of the man he had slain.

"I selected swords, sir, and to meet one after the other, on the shore of Star Cove, an hour before sunset, and feeling that you would help me out, I asked you to come with me, for I have your swords, and pistol-case, too, in the boat."

"You did right to call upon me, Mark, and no advantage shall be taken."

"I am glad you selected swords, too, for I was considered the best hand in the army with a blade, and though your teacher, you have proven yourself my superior, I frankly admit."

"You seem to have a talent for the use of firearms and blades; but if I remember aright, both young Stanwood and Patterson are fine shots and swordsmen."

"Yes, sir."

"You never crossed blades with them, did you?"

"No, sir; but I have no dread of the result."

"Well said, and keep your nerve always under such circumstances."

"But here we are at the cove, and I do not see them."

"They will doubtless drive down by the wood, sir," and Mark turned the boat into the little cove and soon ran ashore.

His father got out and went to an open space near by, while the middy followed with the weapons, bringing the box of pistols, too.

Soon after the rumble of wheels was heard in the distance, and after the sound ceased four persons appeared.

They were Merton Stanwood, Walter Patterson, and two young men from the party of the day before, who were to act as seconds.

They all started at seeing Captain Montague there.

That stern, handsome face had always impressed them, and a l stood in awe of the mysterious Exile.

He bowed in his stately way, and they raised their hats, his presence seeming to impress them unfavorably, for they quieted down at once, as they had come upon the field laughing and chatting together with the air of men who deemed they were going to a frolic.

Then the seconds advanced, and the preliminaries were arranged, Captain Montague saying, with a grim smile:

"As I have had some experience in these deadly meetings, gentlemen, I suppose you will admit that I know what is best?"

The seconds bowed, and the blades brought by Mark were selected, both being alike.

"They are good blades, I assure you, and they have both proven fatal to life. Mr. Stanwood, as I ran a French officer through the heart with the one my son is to use, and the other I loaned to a friend who killed his man with it," said the Exile.

The words were quietly spoken, but they fell like a chill upon the hearers, even Mark being impressed, for he had never before heard his father speak of this duel in his life.

When all was in readiness the Royal Middy and the young mate of a merchant craft faced each other for the deadly meeting.

"My son, disarm your foe, and never kill him if you can avoid it," said the Exile to the Royal Middy.

The two now faced each other, Walter Patterson white-faced and calm, and Mark without the shadow of feeling that he was face to face with death upon his handsome features.

Merton Stanwood was anxious.

He knew that Walter Patterson was a fine swordsman, for they had fenced together often, with the victory more often on his side.

He had heard that Mark was a splendid hand with a blade, but had never seen him tried, and did not know that he had ever learned of a master.

"If he gets the better of Patterson, I must look out," he muttered, and then he added:

"The presence of that man on crutches here, impresses me most strangely."

When the swords came together, each young swordsman felt of his adversary.

Mark did not reveal in his face what he had discovered, but Walter Patterson did by turning a shade paler.

It was a short, sharp combat, and the Royal Middy disarmed his foe, while he said pleasantly:

"I have no desire to harm an old schoolmate, Walter."

Walter Patterson had not the soul to appreciate a generous antagonist, and without a word he turned away; but there was much in his look that was threatening.

"Now, sir, Midshipman Montague is ready for your principal," said Captain Montague with a grim smile, turning to the second of Merton Stanwood.

The young man flushed, bowed and turned to Merton Stanwood, just as Walter Patterson walked up and said in a hoarse whisper:

"You must kill him, Stanwood, kill the Royal Middy, mind you, and avenge us both!"

"I will kill him!" hissed Merton Stanwood, as he seized the sword and took his stand.

Again the blades crossed, and once more with the same result—Merton Stanwood was disarmed, and his life given him.

"I demand a meeting with pistols," cried Stanwood furiously.

"And I say, sir, that after my son has given you both your lives, if you demand another meeting, it shall be with me," said Captain Montague, sternly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEPARTURE.

THE determined stand taken by Captain Montague at once nonplussed Merton Stanwood and his comrades.

They could not but feel that Mark had been most generous, and yet they hated him the more for that.

His success had angered them, not only in his making a name for himself, but that he was rising rapidly where they were at a standstill.

So Merton Stanwood said at once:

"As you take this stand, Captain Montague, we cannot press the matter, so must retire with the understanding that Master Mark refuses to meet us."

"Refuses to meet you?

"By the Lord Harry, but he has just met you and given you your worthless lives."

"Egad, but I have half a mind to let him face you with the pistol, upon my terms that he spares not one of you, and my word for it he handles a pistol as well as he does a sword."

"No, you came here to kill the boy, and he has shown you mercy where you did not deserve it, so begone with the lives he has given you."

Captain Montague was aroused to a pitch of anger which Mark had never seen an exhibition of before, and Stanwood and the others fairly shrank under his burning eyes.

"I am content to meet them, sir, if they demand it," said Mark.

Captain Montague made no reply, and Merton Stanwood, very much cooled down, could only reply:

"No, let the matter rest as it is."

"Come, Mark," said Captain Montague, and taking up the weapons Mark went with his father toward their boat.

"Base cowards!" muttered the irate man, as he took his seat in the stern of the boat.

"Why, my son, there is more of the man in

you than they are able to appreciate, and I honor you for your mercy toward them.

"But if they dog you again, give them a lesson."

Mark made no reply and the boat arrived at the wharf, when Mrs. Montague and Allene came down to meet them.

Mark left the weapons in the boat, not wishing his mother and sister to see them, and yet the keen eyes of Allene fell upon them.

"Mark, give me a row for half an hour on the river," she said.

He acquiesced, and as the boat shot out from the shore, pale and trembling Allene asked:

"Where have you and father been, Mark?"

"Down the river."

"Why are those pistols and swords hidden under the seat?"

"Oh, I wanted some practice and took them," he said indifferently.

"Mark?"

"Well, sis?"

"You have fought a duel."

"Why Allene."

"Do not deny it, for I know; but for heaven's sake tell me did you kill him?"

"Who?"

"Merton Stanwood."

"Why did you think of that man?"

"Well, I knew he would not forgive your blow of yesterday."

"Well, sis, I suppose I must tell, you the truth," and seeing how anxious Allene was Mark told her all that had happened.

"Oh Mark! what a life of deadly danger yours has become," she sighed.

"These are times of deadly danger sister Allene."

"But I did not seek the trouble, and I feel better for having given to each man his life."

"As for Merton Stanwood I do not believe I could be forced to take his life."

"Why, Mark?"

"Because he saved you from death."

"Oh Mark, is that your only reason?"

"I fear too, sis, that you love him, bad as he is, and I would not grieve your heart."

"But, if he attempts to trifle with your love, he must beware," and the eyes of the middy flashed dangerously.

"Mark, some day you will know just how I feel toward this man."

"More I cannot, will not say."

"Now let us go ashore, for it is getting chilly on the waters."

Mark made no reply and turned the boat's prow homeward, and they soon joined their parents at the supper table.

Some days after the Sea-Cat returned to port, having made a safe and successful run to Boston and back under Skipper Buntline, as the old sailor was now called.

He told Mark that he had visited the Shark at her dock, and that she was being put in splendid trim and would soon be ready.

So Mark decided to take the Sea-Cat back to Boston, and at once began his preparations to get ready.

The day of sailing came, farewells were said, and the pretty sloop started on her way down the river just as night fell upon the waters, the young middy going out upon the world to begin a new career and carve out his own destiny.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLOTS.

THERE were never a more crestfallen party of men gathered together, than the quartette who stood on the shore and saw Mark Montague and his father enter their boat and row away from Star Cove.

For a moment neither of the four spoke.

Then one of the seconds burst out with:

"Well!"

"What do you see well in what has just happened, Vincent Ream?" sullenly asked Merton Stanwood.

"I don't see anything well in it; but it was an ejaculation of amazement, for I expected one of you to kill that youth."

"He was born for luck," growled Walter Patterson.

"Yes, and he has considerable skill with his luck," put in Merton Stanwood.

"And pluck added," Vincent Ream rejoined.

"Ah, he's plucky, I admit; but when that father of his appeared it was like putting ice down my back."

"It took all the nerve out of me."

"He knows what dueling is, that's certain."

So they talked for awhile, and then Stanwood asked:

"What are you going to do about it, Walter?"

"What can I do?"

"Do you mean to let him crow over us?"
 "Will he?"
 "Of course he will."
 "Can't we get the better of him some way?"
 "We might."
 "How?"
 "He goes to Boston soon in his sloop."
 "I don't understand."
 "Is it dead silence between us?" and Stanwood looked at the four searchingly.
 All replied in the affirmative, and the young man continued:
 "It is known that Caspar the Corsair escaped."
 "Well, what has that got to do with our case?"
 "If the sloop were to be taken it would be supposed that he captured her."
 "Ah yes."
 "He will have but Buntline, the negro and three lads, I think in the crew."
 "There may be passengers."
 "We must see there are not."
 "How can we?"
 "A rumor that Caspar is lying in wait for the sloop will keep all from going by her."
 "That's true."
 "And she can readily be taken."
 "We are but four."
 "True, but men can be picked up who will attack the sloop."
 "What will we do with the sloop?"
 "Give her to those who take her."
 "Stanwood."
 "Well, Walter?"
 "Come out boldly with your plot."
 "I thought I had."
 "You mean that we four, with others we can pick up, can capture the sloop, and—"
 "No, I do not intend to put my neck in a noose, nor do you care to, I suppose."
 "Not I."
 "No, sir."
 "I was not born to adorn a yard-arm," were the responses.
 "Well, we need not be known in the matter, but we can get some picked men, tell them they are to get a prize by capturing the sloop, and see to it that they get rid of Montague."
 "Then they can run the sloop to some port and sell her and her cargo, and it will all be laid upon Caspar, while we get rid of the boy and consequently have our revenge."
 "A good plan; but where are we to get the men?"
 "Let each of us agree to get one and have our men get two others, which will make twelve."
 "Will they be enough?"
 "Oh yes, for there will be but six or seven on the sloop."
 "Where will they take her?"
 "In the narrow channel at the river's mouth."
 "Board her in boats?"
 "Yes."
 "All right, I'll do my share."
 "And I."
 "So will I."
 Thus it was arranged and the plotters returned to their carriage and drove back to the town.
 With ample time to look about them, they readily picked out their men, whom they wanted for the work.
 There were, at the time, plenty of reckless spirits hanging about, ready to enter into any plot that would pay, and in a few days twelve men had been secured, one had been selected as chief, another as mate, and they had their orders.
 These orders were that they were to seize the sloop Sea-Cat, kill the middy at all hazards, and do as they pleased with the rest of the crew.
 Then they could run the sloop to some port, sell her and the cargo on board and divide it among themselves.
 So it was that when the Sea-Cat sailed she went without a single passenger, for most industriously had rumors been put afloat that Caspar the Corsair was to capture her on her run to Boston.
 The rumors reached the ears of Lola Stanwood, and the lovely girl, to the surprise of Allene, rode up one day to the Montague home, mounted upon her spirited pony, and with a negro attendant, and asked:
 "Does Master Mark sail in the Sea-Cat tomorrow, Miss Montague?"
 "Yes, he goes by the sloop to Boston," answered Allene, gazing with admiration upon the beautiful girl, of whose defense of himself Mark had told her.

"Well, my father wished that I should ride by and ask him not to risk going by the sloop, but to take the stage, and I hope he will not go by sea too, for it is said that horrid Caspar the freebooter is lying in wait for the Sea-Cat."
 "It is very kind of your father, Miss Lola, and of you, to think of Mark's safety, and he will appreciate it, as I do; but he is not one to turn from his way on account of danger, and I suppose he will go in the sloop."
 "I hope not, and please tell him I say so."
 "Tell him also, when he gets his new vessel, to come up the river and let us all see how he looks in his uniform."
 "Good-by, and come and see me, Miss Montague, for I would like to be friends with you," and kissing her finger-tips she rode away at a gallop.
 Mark seemed pleased to know that Lola Stanwood had called, and also wished to see him in his uniform, and he made up his mind that the Shark should find her way into the Kennebec before very long.
 But he stuck to his determination to go by sea, and thus it was that the Sea-Cat sailed with him on her deck, while his parents and sister looked after him with sadness and anxiety, for it seemed to be an accepted thing that the sloop would fall a prey to Caspar and his men, though from whence had sprung the rumor of his lying in wait for the packet, no one seemed to know.
 Still all dreaded evil, and gazed after the Sea-Cat with anxiety in their hearts as she sailed away in the gloom.

CHAPTER XV.

CAUGHT IN THE TRAP.

BEHIND a mass of rock, jutting out from the shore, some distance above the mouth of the Kennebec, a boat was moored.

It was a long fishing-skiff, and had four oars to a side, and in the boat were twelve men.

They had a small anchor out over the bows, and the boat was dancing upon the tiny waves, for the wind was light and the waters smooth.

The men talked in low tones as they sat there, and were evidently waiting for some vessel, for their eyes were often turned up the stream, and one of their number held a glass to his eye nearly all the time.

Presently they were silent, for the sound of oars fell upon their ears.

It came from far out upon the river, near the other shore.

It was starlight, and too dark to see a great distance, so they could only conjecture as to the boat.

"It is going up the river," said one.

"Some fishermen bound for the city," remarked another.

"That is not a fishing-boat."

"Why?"

"The rowing is too steady."

"Yes, it sounds like a man-of-war's boat."

"It may be the barge from the fort below."

"What can be carrying the fort-barge up by night?"

"I wish we knew."

"It won't prevent our little game."

"Oh, no, and the sloop should soon be along." So they talked together, while the sound of the oars gradually died away in the distance.

Some time passed, and then the man with the glass said:

"There she comes!"

All was at once attention, and soon after, to the naked eye, a sail was visible upon the waters.

The wind was light, as I have said, hardly over four knots an hour, and the vessel came slowly along, for it had the tide to fight.

As the craft came near, her white sails became distinctly visible, and it was seen that she was a sloop.

The men in the boat were now all attention.

The eight oarsmen sat ready, and two men crouched in the stern with boat-hooks in hand.

In the stern were two more men, one with his grasp upon the tiller, the other holding a cutlass.

By the side of the oarsmen were pistols and cutlasses, ready to seize at an instant's notice.

"We might move out upon the waters and lie on our oars, for, going as the sloop is, they would hardly see us," said the man who had his hand on the tiller.

"Yes, do so."

"Give way, men!"

Such was the response of the one who held the cutlass.

The men gave a strong pull on their oars, and the boat went flying away from its hiding-place as one of those in the bow raised the anchor.

"Remember, men, we are to kill the middy," said the one with the cutlass, and who appeared to be leader.

"Better kill 'em all, for dead men can't tell tales," growled one of the oarsmen.

"No, the middy is the one to kill, and he only, for the others we are to make prisoners and land near some port, so we won't be pursued; but the Royal Middy must die. Now, way 'nough!"

The oars were raised, and then came the order:

"Put on your masks now, lads, for no man wishes to be recognized as having been in this night's work, or it will be a game of hang when we go back to the port."

The men all took from their pockets a rude mask, and each one fastened it firmly upon his face.

The boat now lay in the path of the sloop, which was coming on rapidly, considering the light wind and the strong tide against her.

Those on the sloop certainly did not see the danger lurking in their path, for the Sea-Cat did not swerve from her course.

Suddenly a voice on the little packet broke forth in song, and that caused those in the boat to feel perfectly secure in their coming success.

Nearer and nearer came the sloop, and the singer on board kept up his song, in a shrill tenor voice, for it was none other than Chips.

Suddenly the song ceased, and then came the shrill hail:

"Boat ahoy! boat ahoy!"

A moment after Chips shouted:

"Ho, skipper, port your helm, port hard! or you'll be into the boat!"

Buntline was at the helm, and he sought to obey, when there came a shock, as the bows fell off, and the boat was alongside.

Forms leaped on deck, there was a short, sharp struggle, a fall or two, a command, and then then the words spoken in triumph, by the leader of the boat's crew:

"The sloop is ours! Now for open water!"

The large skiff was dropped astern and held by a tow-line, and the Sea-Cat under an outlaw crew was held on her way out to sea.

She had fallen into the trap set for her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MIDDY'S LUCK.

WHEN Mark sailed away in the Sea-Cat, he did not anticipate any attack from Caspar.

He felt assured that Caspar was in hiding somewhere, and perhaps Carl Dent with him, and they were plotting mischief without doubt; but the hunt for them in Boston, and other seaports had been too hot for them to do much else than lie hidden.

The rumor that Caspar was to seize the Sea-Cat Mark could trace to no reliable source, and at last came to the conclusion that it was started just to keep people from taking passage with him.

With this shrewd decision he sailed in the sloop, taking only the precautions necessary to defend his vessel should it be attacked.

The little vessel had not sailed very far down the river, when Mark's keen ears caught the sound of oars.

"Some boat is on the river, Buntline," he said.

"Do you see it, sir?"

"No, I hear it."

All listened, and the steady stroke of oars came directly up the river toward them.

"Fishermen coming up to town I guess."

"No, Buntline, that is a man-of-war's stroke, or the barge from the fort."

"Doubtless the latter, Master Mark."

In a little while Mark sighted the boat.

It was a large one, with six oars out to a side, and coming along with the tide at a fine speed, directly toward the sloop.

"Get the firearms on deck, Charcoal, you and Chips, for that may be a foe," said Mark.

The muskets, pistols and cutlasses, which the sloop boasted as armament were brought on deck, and all was in readiness to meet a foe, should those in the boat prove such.

Suddenly, as the sloop came within hail, there came across the waters:

"Sloop ahoy!"

"Ahoy the barge!"

"Is that the Sea-Cat?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Is Midshipman Montague aboard?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I wish to board you, if you will heave to."

"Is that the fort barge?"

"Yes, sir."

"We are going so slow, against the tide, sir, and with this light breeze, you can run alongside."

"Ay, ay," and a moment after the barge was within oar's length of the sloop.

"I am Lieutenant Dunn, Midshipman Montague, and the major sent me up to ask you to take the information with all dispatch to Boston, that a French sloop-of-war has run into one of the coves on the coast, a league or so from the south of the river, to repair damages.

"She looked badly damaged, and will doubtless be there some days, and there must be a cruiser at Portland, Portsmouth, or Boston to run up and attack her."

"I thank you, sir, and I will bear the news at once, and I can make far quicker time by stage, so if you will row me up to the farm of Mr. Rollins yonder, I will get a cart and have time to head the coach off, while my sloop can go on without me."

This was decided upon, and Mark sprung into the boat, while the Sea-Cat held on her way.

The young lieutenant then ordered his men to give way at their oars, and half an hour after Mark was in Farmer Rollins' sulky with him, driving with all haste to catch the stage-coach.

Hardly had the farmer drawn up on the highway when the coach came thundering along, and Mark was glad to find a seat alongside of the driver, whom he knew.

In the mean while the sloop went on her way down the river, to fall into the hands of the crew lying in wait for her.

So sudden was the attack, so unexpected, that Charcoal, Buntline and the lads were seized and thrown into the cabin, though not until the former had laid one of the assailants dead upon the deck.

There was one however on board at the time of the attack, that had not been captured.

The captors looked in vain for Mark, and were greatly disappointed when told that he had not come on the sloop, but had taken the stage to Boston.

The one whom they also did not catch, was Chips.

He was a very slippery youth, and the very moment that he saw odds were against them, he rolled into the water with very great alacrity.

He was a fine swimmer, and, as the packet swept on, he made for the shore.

Reaching there he scrambled out, gained the highway and went at a swift trot for the home of the Montagues.

Panting like a tired-out hound, he reached the house just as Allene was closing the door.

"Oh, Chips! what has happened?" cried the maiden.

"My son! my son! what of him?" Mrs. Montague gasped.

"He's all right, and gone to Boston by stage, but ther sloop's tuk," panted Chips.

Then, in broken sentences, he told his story.

"Brother landed, you say, to head off the stage?" cried Allene.

"Yes, miss."

"Then I will mount Snowflake and overtake the stage and tell him. I can do it by hard riding. Tell Abram to saddle Snowflake, Chips, while I get ready," and Allene darted toward her room.

In ten minutes she reappeared, ready for her long, hard ride, and mounting, dashed away in the darkness, followed by the words of her father:

"God bless you, my brave girl!"

"I guesses I don't get left all alone," cried Chips, and ere Captain Montague could check him, he went off at a run toward town.

Chips knew just where he could get a horse, and a good one.

He told a story to get the animal, said he wished to go after the doctor, out at a farm, visiting a patient, and mounting without a saddle, went off like John Gilpin.

Allene had quite a little start, but then Snowflake was getting old, and was not as fleet as he had been, while Chips was mounted on a racer, so that he felt he would not be far away when the maiden overtook the coach.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUICK WORK.

THE stage-coach lumbered along slowly over the rough roads, though with a great show of speed, which naturally deceived a passenger into the belief that the Jehu was making good time.

Behind the coach, however, was a horse that was making good speed, and still further back an animal came on at a still faster pace.

The former bore on his back Allene Montague, and she was not sparing the whip, so anx-

ious was she to overtake her brother and tell him of the capture of his vessel by Caspar, the Freebooter.

Seated on the stage-box with the driver Mark was enjoying his ride greatly.

"I hear the clatter of hoofs behind us," at last he said to the driver.

"I guess not, Master Middy," was the reply.

"But I do hear hoof-falls, and the horse is coming hard."

The driver drew rein as he spoke, and the rattle of hoofs was distinctly heard, and coming on at a rapid pace.

A moment more and what looked like a phantom steed came in sight.

The animal was snow-white—the rider was clad in black.

Up to the stage the horse ran, and was drawn to a sudden halt.

"Allene!"

"Brother Mark, I am so glad I have overtaken you, for I came to tell you that Caspar the Corsair has seized your sloop," cried Allene to the Royal Middy.

"Caspar has seized the Sea-Cat?" repeated Mark, while the heads of the passengers were thrust out of the windows in alarm, for hearing the name of the pirate, and the stage coming to a halt, they at first, awakened from their slumbers, thought that Caspar had seized them.

"Yes, he seized the vessel in the river."

"But how know you this, sis, and how were you aware that I had come by stage?"

"Chips escaped from the sloop and ran home, telling us that you had landed to head the stage off, and I mounted Snowflake and came after you."

"You are a dear, brave girl, and I thank you ever so much; but did Chips tell you more?"

"That was enough, I thought, so I came on at once after you."

"Poor sis, and poor Snowflake; but I will soon get her back, for at the next village I shall push on with a special team—But, hark!"

All now heard the clatter of hoofs coming nearer and nearer.

"That horse is fairly flying," said the driver.

"My word for it, it is Chips," said Mark, who seemed to know his sailor friend pretty well.

Hardly had he uttered the words when up dashed Chips, and taking in the situation at a glance, he cried out:

"I'm here too."

"Bravo, Chips! how did you get here?" said Allene.

"On top of that horse, missy, for I said I wanted ter fetch a doctor, and I does, for Skipper Mark is the doctor as is needed just now for Caspar."

"Tell me what you know, Chips," said Mark. In a word the lad told all.

"You are wet as a drowned rat, and worn out, so go back with my sister and stay at home until I put into the river for you," said Mark.

"Not much, Master Mark, for Missy Allene could hav give you the news. I came along to go with you, and I'll turn the horse loose and he'll go back."

"But my sister should not return alone."

"She come alone," was the unanswerable argument.

Mark really wanted the boy with him, and so Allene said:

"I am not afraid to go back, and would have had to go alone anyhow, if Chips had not come. Take him with you, brother Mark, and do not delay any longer."

"Here, Chips, give me your rein, and I will lead the horse back. Who does he belong to?"

"The Sailors' Delight Tavern, missy," and Chips was "on deck," as he called it, in an instant, the driver giving him a blanket to wrap up in, for the boy was drenched from his swim.

Springing from the box, Mark said a few words to his sister in a low tone, bade her good-by, and the stage rolled on.

"Push them hard, please, until the next village, where I can get a team," he said to the driver, and those stage horses were surprised at the manner in which the whip cracked over them, and in a short time the coach rolled into the village.

A team was hastily secured, with a driver, and the two youths dashed off on their way, going three miles to the stage's one.

Arriving in Portland Mark found there was no vessel or men there, and he pushed on to Portsmouth, getting fresh horses whenever necessary, and there finding no cruiser he pushed along for Boston.

It was night when he reached Boston, at that time the most flourishing town in the New England Colonies, and he went at once to the house of Commodore Rutledge.

He was warmly greeted, and when he told his story the commodore said:

"My brave fellow, a cruiser left port this afternoon, so all you can do is to get to sea in the Shark, which was reported to be all ready this very day. So you have a *carte blanche* to get your crew and put to sea at the earliest moment."

With this Mark departed, and so energetically did he go to work that the Shark, armed and equipped, and with a crew of forty men on board, sailed out of Boston Harbor soon after sunrise.

"Bless my soul! there goes that mad middy in his vessel already! I wish we had more like him," cried the commodore, as, while making his morning toilet he glanced from his window and beheld the Shark under full sail, standing swiftly out of the harbor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PIRATE'S SPY.

A PARTY of gay young men were enjoying themselves at the Sailors' Delight Inn, and the glass was circulating freely, clouds of smoke from their pipes arose above their heads, and boisterous laughter followed a well-told story.

Among the group were Walter Patterson, Merton Stanwood, Vincent Ream, and the other young man who had figured as second in the double duel, Gail Hammond.

There were others present, a dozen in all, and they were making merry over their grog, while older heads looked on and were serious as to the future of the fast youths.

Presently the landlord came up and said:

"Master Stanwood, there is a person out here who wishes to speak with you."

"Ask him in," said Merton Stanwood.

"Oh, no, you had better go and see him."

Merton Stanwood had a guilty conscience, and he started, turned slightly pale, and arose from the table.

Without the tavern he saw a man standing in the shadow of the piazza, for it was night, and seeming to wish to avoid the light shining from the window.

"Well, sir, is it Merton Stanwood you wish, for I do not know you," he said, haughtily.

"Yes, I wish you, and I am glad that my disguise is so good that you fail to recognize me. Let us walk apart."

Merton Stanwood started visibly.

It seemed that he knew the voice, if not the face, for he said:

"You here?"

"Oh, yes, why not?"

"I feared you were dead."

"Not I; but come."

They walked away from the tavern, down toward the river, and suddenly they saw dash by them a white horse, upon which was a female rider.

"Allene Montague!" broke from the lips of Stanwood.

"Who?"

"Miss Allene Montague."

"She rides well and fast."

"Yes, but where can she be going?"

"I know not; but is she related to our friend, the Royal Middy?"

"His sister."

"Ah! but it does not look well for her riding abroad so late at night. See, she has taken the stage road to Brunswick."

"Yes, I cannot understand it; but what brought you here?"

"I came in a small craft. Got in at daylight, but dared not show myself, and to-night find the Sea-Cat has sailed."

"Yes, she put to sea this afternoon, about sunset."

"I am sorry, and I expected a letter from you at our rendezvous."

"I supposed you were dead, or in hiding, so did not write."

"No, I never say die, and I do not hide long."

"There was nothing to write about."

"The sloop was here."

"True."

"You should have known, as I had lost my schooner, I wanted a vessel."

"Well, you have come too late to catch the sloop. You will have to await her return."

"No, I never remain idle, so must get another."

"How can you?"

"I am not alone."

"Ah!"

"No, I have a faithful mate with me."

"Two men can do nothing."

"I have others."

"Where are they?"

"On the coaster that brought us here."

"You have a crew but no vessel."

"True."

"What will you do to get one?"

"Tell me what is in port?"

"I hardly know."

"Find out," was the laconic response.

"Why will not the craft you came in do?"

"She is a mere tub, and her skipper brought us here merely because we gave him good pay. He has only himself and two sons on board, so will keep dark as to his bringing us, and what we do. Now think up a craft for me, for I must go out to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, for the tide will soon be running out, the wind, what there is of it, blows down the river, and I can be well out to sea by sunrise. I want a good craft."

Stanwood was silent a moment, as though in deep thought, and then he said:

"I need money, and if you will pay me what I ask, I will tell you how to secure a splendid craft."

"What is she?"

"As trim a brig as floats."

"Where is she?"

"I will say no more until I get my price, for I tell you I am pushed to the wall here for money, and my spying work for you has so far been valueless to me."

"Well, I have only met with misfortune of late; through that accursed Royal Middy; but I will pay you gold, if you must have it, for you can still be useful to me as a spy."

"Now tell me about this vessel, for remember, Caspar, The Corsair, never goes back on his word, and having made you a promise I will keep it."

"I want your gold, not your promises," said Stanwood hotly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COMPACT.

"I will pay you your gold," sullenly said the pirate.

"Mind you, I need gold, and now, or I will have to leave town. The truth is I raised some money, in a way that will get me into trouble, unless it is paid back within a few days, and for that reason I am urgent with you."

"How much do you need?"

"Six hundred pounds."

The pirate gave a whistle, indicative of amazement, and then said:

"It is a big sum. Can you not do with less?"

"Not a pound."

"Will this sum pay all your debts?"

"Every farthing."

"I could buy a good vessel for that sum."

"Not such a craft as I have in mind."

"A brig you say?"

"Yes."

"Her tonnage?"

"About two hundred tons."

"Is she fleet?"

"Yes, for I was on a trial sail with her several days ago."

"She is ready for sea?"

"Yes, all ready."

"What was she intended for?"

"She is to be put under command of a friend of mine, one who has been in foreign seas, as mate of one of his father's vessels, and came back but a short while since. His father is an old merchant of wealth, and thinks he can see into the future further than most men, so built this brig with a view to turning her into a privateer."

"Ah! that is good."

"He spared no expense upon her, and she was modeled for speed and seaworthiness, while she spreads a great deal of canvas."

"The merchant thinks war will soon break out, between the Colonies and the king, and he wants to have a vessel ready to make an American privateer of."

"In the mean time she is to be put in the coasting trade between the Massachusetts Colonies and the Carolinas."

"I see, and I guess she's the craft I need."

"I know she is, for she went by vessels I know to be fast, when we had her out for trial, as though they were hove to."

"No stores on board?"

"Not yet."

"Furnished?"

"Yes, completely."

"Rigged?"

"Perfectly."

"When was she to sail?"

"She would have gone to sea about this time, but my friend has been on a little spree of late, and his father will not let him take command

yet, and may not give her to him. I lost the sloop, Sea-Cat, by just such conduct."

"It would pay you better to lead a good life."

"Advice from a pirate."

"Oh, yes, I can advise from bitter experience; but about what was the cost of this craft?"

"All of two thousand pounds."

"I'll give you the six hundred for her."

"I ought to have more."

"Not a pound, for that was your price."

"I will have my interest in your work in her then?"

"No."

"Our compact was that I was to get one-third I helped you to."

"But I pay you for this vessel."

"I want my interest also in your cruise."

"Come, I'll tell you what I'll do." I'll give you your six hundred pounds, and then I will allow you an interest in my cruise, the same as an officer on my vessel will have."

"How much is that?"

"I take one-third, the crew get one third, and the remainder goes to my officers and expenses."

"It is too little."

"It might prove a very large sum, for I am no drone in that line, when I am at sea."

"Very well, I accept your terms."

"And you are to constantly keep me posted on all that is valuable information, so that I can make captures?"

"Yes; but do you intend to turn pirate out and out?"

"Yes, for I might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

Stanwood laughed, and then Caspar said:

"Now, where is this vessel?"

"She lies yonder, not a cable's-length away."

"How many are on board of her?"

"A watchman only, I think."

"Well, I will get my men and board her. Here is your money," and he took a large roll of crisp notes of the Bank of England from his pocket and said:

"These are hundred-pound notes, and here are six of them."

"You go well supplied."

"I have my fortune with me, and Midshipman Montague has cut it down considerably of late; but I hope to retrieve it before long."

"How many men have you?"

"My lieutenant and twenty men, and all good fellows."

"Well, come with me to the shore and I will point out the brig. Then I must return and leave you to work out your own salvation."

CHAPTER XX.

THE KIDNAPPER.

WALKING down to the shore with the pirate, Merton Stanwood pointed out to him the brig, dimly seen in the darkness, a cable's-length offshore at anchor.

If his mind was disturbed at selling that which did not belong to him, of trading off the vessel of his particular friend, Walter Patterson, it did not show in his face or actions.

He cared nothing for Merchant Patterson's property where he could get money enough to pay his debts, take up some notes to which he had forged his father's name, and still have a balance over of a hundred pounds or so.

"I will make Allene Montague marry me now, for this balance will give us a trip to Boston. I will have to run off with her, I know; but father likes the girl, and will come down handsomely when he sees I am married and intend to settle down."

"Of course old Montague will be furious, but Mark will be out of the way, and I guess the parents will forgive me when they know the girl is my wife and loves me."

"Such were the thoughts that flashed through the mind of the young profligate, who was now in fact a pirate's spy."

So he pointed out to the pirate the brig, and was then anxious to get away, for he did not care to be seen by any curious ones that may be down by the wharves at that time of night.

The pirate understood his motive, so said:

"Don't remain longer, Master Stanwood, for I know how you feel; but keep me posted with letters at the same old rendezvous, and should the world go hard with you, just hunt me up and I will give you a berth as an officer, for you were once a king's midshipman, I believe."

"Yes, but I will never turn pirate."

"We never know what we will be, Master Stanwood. But good-by, and luck to you."

Stanwood grasped the hand of the pirate and hastened away, returning to his comrades at the inn.

In the mean time the pirate captain went along the shore until he came to a boat drawn out upon the beach.

He got into it and rowed out to a clumsy-looking sloop that lay at anchor in the stream.

"Come, lads, we will go ashore now," he said to several men who were grouped together on the deck.

"I hain't sorry you is goin' ter leave us, fer I is gettin' skeert at havin' yer along," said the old skipper of the sloop.

"I brought a boat from the shore, which will hold us all. Good-night, skipper, and you and your sons had better show no surprise at what you may hear in the morning."

Other men now came up out of the cabin, and one asked:

"What success, captain?"

"Good! but get the men into the boat and we will be off."

The men were soon crowded into the boat, one of them took the one pair of oars, and a jacket was placed in each socket to deaden the sound.

Then the boat left the sloop and was guided down the river.

Soon the brig loomed up ahead in the darkness and Caspar said to the man at his side:

"That is our craft."

"She looks like a beauty," was the answer.

"I guess she is."

"Any one on board?"

"One or two perhaps. Now board and seize them, but let there be no noise."

The men were all armed and went quickly over the side of the vessel onto her decks.

A sleepy watchman was surprised, seized, bound and gagged before he knew that there were foes on his vessel.

Then the daring outlaw leader thought of something which he wished to have Merton Stanwood find out for him, and said:

"Dent, I shall go ashore again, so have all ready to be off the moment you see me put away from the shore coming back. Put that prisoner in the boat, with two men to accompany me, and I will leave him ashore when I come off."

Carl Dent obeyed his orders and the pirate-captain soon after landed in the shadow of a wharf, and wended his way rapidly back to the inn, for he seemed to know the town well.

Merton Stanwood was again sent for, and he turned pale at sight of Caspar again.

"What has happened?" he gasped.

"No more than that I have the brig all right, but returned to give you this list of vessels that I wish to ascertain about, as to their days of sailing, cargoes and where bound. It is a list prepared by an agent for me, and they will prove valuable prizes, I hope. Good-by again, and leave all communications at the rendezvous."

So saying Caspar turned on his heel and walked briskly away.

As he came to a corner a horse almost dashed over him, and, reined in sharply by the driver, fell.

The rider was thrown to the ground, falling heavily, and instantly Caspar sprung forward and caught her up in his arms, for it was Allene Montague.

"It is the Royal Middy's sister!" he cried, and he bore her rapidly toward his boat, Allene remaining perfectly quiet in his arms, being either stunned by the fall, or in a faint.

CHAPTER XXI.

STARTLING TIDINGS.

THE group about the table at the Sailors' Delight, were still carrying on their stories and songs, for Landlord Lucas never turned good customers out of doors, no matter how late was the hour.

He had been more than pleased, too, at having Merton Stanwood call him aside and say:

"By the way, Boniface, I struck the old gentleman to-day for a hundred pounds, and I wish you would just take out my bill and hand me the balance."

"Certainly, Master Merton, certainly, sir; but there is no hurry for it," said the landlord, as he grasped the money.

"No hurry, sir," he repeated.

No hurry, and yet he had been dunning the young profligate for weeks past for what he owed him.

But then, when he had the money to pay it was a different thing.

So the landlord took out his account, with a few pounds extra, well knowing that Stanwood could not guess within five pounds of what he owed.

And the balance was handed over, and both

were satisfied, for Stanwood was afraid that he owed more than the bill proved to be.

Then drinks were called for, and paid for in cash by the young scamp, and as it was after midnight, the party were thinking of breaking up, when in dashed a man with livid face and cried:

"Men all, Caspar the Corsair has been here and stolen the brig Dare-Devil from her anchorage!"

All were on their feet in an instant, and a score of questions were asked at once.

The man's head was bleeding from a gash on it, and one arm was bound by a cord, while he held in his hand a gag.

It was the watchman of the brig, and he quickly told his story when Walter Patterson, white as a sheet, commanded silence and asked:

"Tell just what happened, Gordon?"

"Well, sir, I was on the brig, leaning against the mainmast, when I heard a slight thump against the side."

"But I paid no attention to it, for the tide had turned, and logs often come against the hull with a bump."

"Then I saw a man standing by my side, and before I could say a word, he hit me over the head with a pistol."

"It cut this gash, as you see, and I was slightly stunned."

"But I saw other men on the deck, heard them call one man Captain Caspar, and then he gave orders to bundle me into a boat and send me ashore."

"I was bound securely, gagged, and put in the boat."

"When we landed he, Captain Caspar, came up town, and in a short while returned, and he had a lady in his arms."

"Quick, lads, I've got the Royal Middy's sister here, and shall take her along."

"Her horse fell with her and she is stunned."

"That's what he said, and the men laid me out upon the wharf, and they took the girl in the boat and pulled for the brig."

"I twisted myself around, so that I could see the brig; and her sails were quickly set and away she went down the river."

"I tried hard to get loose, but it was no use, until a negro cook of a coaster came along and saw me."

"He helped me to free my arms, and I took the gag out of my mouth as I ran here, for I knew I would find the Sailors' Delight open, and supposed you would be here, Master Walter."

Merton Stanwood had turned livid, when the man spoke of the pirates having kidnapped Allene Montague.

He knew that she must have been returning, from wherever she had gone on horseback, and thus come upon the pirates.

Had she been hurt by her fall?

What would be her fate?

Stanwood really loved Allene, in his way, and his heart grew cold as he felt that she was in the power of Caspar the Corsair.

Where he had taken her he could not guess, and yet it could only be for revenge against the Royal Middy, he supposed.

He questioned the man Gordon closely, but could glean no other facts.

Then all looked at each other and the question went around:

"What is to be done?"

No one seemed to know.

The crowd were pretty well sobered by the news, and Walter Patterson hastened off to inform his father.

Stanwood told Landlord Lucas to loan him his horse, to ride up to Rock Hill, and to the Montagues', and inform his father and the captain of what had happened.

Then he learned that the lad Chips, known to have sailed on the Sea-Cat, had gotten the landlord's fast horse to go after a doctor somewhere, and had not returned.

"Why the boy sailed in the Sea-Cat!"

"So I supposed, Master Merton; but he did not, it seems, and came here for my horse and I let him have him; but I'll give you another animal."

They went out to the stable together, and there they found the animal Chips had taken, hitched to the barn door.

"Well, well! and he has been ridden hard, too."

"The boy should have come to the inn and told me he had come back."

"But I'll get Roan out for you, sir."

In a few minutes after Stanwood was mounted and riding with all speed up to his house, on the hill, and the grandest mansion in those parts.

He aroused his father and told him what had

happened, and the judge said that word must be at once dispatched to Portland, by special messenger, for a cruiser, and he told his son to send a man off immediately, with a note he quickly wrote to the commandant of the fort at that port.

"I'll have to send the note at once, and yet I guess Caspar can take care of himself."

"Curse him! I don't care if they hang him, now that he has taken Allene Montague."

"I will find him, and he must give her up."

"But what a hubbub there will be when it's known that the Sea-Cat was captured, also—and by Caspar the Corsair, too."

He laughed grimly as he said this, well knowing that the pirate would get the credit of the capture of the sloop also.

But there was one thing that worried him, and that was the fact that Chips, whom he had seen sail on the Sea-Cat, had come back and gone on that night ride.

Then, too, what did it mean that Allene was abroad alone at night, and on horseback?

"I will go first to the home of Captain Montague, and then back to town and start a messenger, for this worries me," he said to himself, and urging his horse into a gallop he rode rapidly toward the home of the Exile.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PURSUIT.

THE clatter of hoofs on the rocky path, as Merton Stanwood dashed up to the door, brought Captain Montague out, for he naturally thought that it was Allene returning.

He and his wife were sitting up awaiting her return with considerable anxiety, for they knew that she would have to ride hard to overtake the stage, and perhaps a long distance.

Then, too, she would have to go alone through interminable forests, where there were wolves and other dread wild beasts.

As he came from the lighted room, he could not see well out in the darkness, so he called out:

"Back again, my brave girl!"

"It is Merton Stanwood, Captain Montague, and I bring news of your daughter."

"Great God! What of her?" cried the man.

It was no time for ceremony, and springing from his horse Stanwood entered the cheerful sitting-room.

Mrs. Montague had again arisen, pale and anxious, and the eyes of both husband and wife looked eagerly upon the visitor.

"Captain Montague, the Corsair Caspar has been up to town, cut out the new brig belonging to Merchant Patterson, and coming upon your daughter, seized her and carried her off."

Mrs. Montague sunk back in her chair with a moan.

But the brave man said quickly:

"Caspar the Pirate has carried off my child?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long ago?"

"Some hours, or more."

"Cut out the new brig Dare-Devil, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"He has wind and tide with him, and so has a good start?"

"He has."

"Where was my child?"

She was on horseback, it seems, returning toward home, and her horse fell, throwing her, and Caspar took her up and carried her to his vessel.

"This the watchman of the brig, Gordon, told me, and I let your horse into the gate, as I came in, for he was waiting there."

"Mr. Stanwood!"

"Well, sir?"

"I believe you to be a brave man, no matter what your faults may be."

"I hope so, sir."

"There are a number of gallant youths about this town, who have professed to admire my daughter, and now is their chance to prove their worth."

"I am a cripple, as you know; but I fortunately received a wooden leg to-day, which suits me well, and I will go as commander of a vessel in chase of that pirate, and I want you for my first mate, for you have had a sea training on a vessel-of-war, and Walter Patterson, who has lost his vessel, can be second mate, if he will."

"The brig is of course unarmed, so we will be equal, and I do not think Caspar can have a very large crew."

"Now, are you willing to go into town and raise twenty or thirty gallant fellows, for the fort will give us arms, as we go by, and a messenger can be sent down to have them ready for us, so we will not be detained?"

"I am ready, sir, and will return at once and get the men together."

"Where will you join us?"

"In the town in half an hour."

"God bless you," murmured Mrs. Montague, and knowing how little he deserved other than curses, Merton Stanwood leaped upon his horse and rode back to town.

He first dispatched a messenger with his father's letter, to the commandant at Portland, and then the town bells were rung to arouse the people, and soon crowds of men were gathered at the inn.

After dispatching Abram to the fort, with a letter to the commander, explaining the situation, and asking for arms, Captain Montague bade his wife farewell, leaving her with old Chloe, and started for the town.

Stanwood had already reported what he meant to do, and Walter Patterson had volunteered at once, while two-score gallant young sailors were ready to ship on board a vessel to start in pursuit of the pirate.

"No danger of our catching the sloop?" asked Walter Patterson.

"Oh, no, I guess not; but what craft can we get?" said Stanwood.

"Father offers his schooner, the Fleetwing, and you know she is fast."

"The very craft," and as Captain Montague approached, Merton Stanwood joined him and made known what arrangements had been made.

A store was hastily opened, stores put on board, Judge Stanwood telling the proprietor to charge all to him, for the old judge had come down into the town at the ringing of the bells, and three hours after the flight of the pirates in the brig, the schooner Fleetwing set sail in pursuit.

A short stop was made at the fort, a heavy gun was hastily lowered on board, and a crew to work it ordered with it under an officer, and a dozen stands of arms, with cutlasses and pistols were also supplied by the commandant.

Then the schooner went flying along out to sea, in the early morning, for the wind was increasing in strength, at a ten-knot speed.

Every eye searched the sea, as they gained an offing, and far away in the distance a tiny speck upon the watery horizon indicated a sail, and the schooner was at once crowded with all canvas in hot pursuit, while Walter Patterson said anxiously, addressing Stanwood:

"If it should be the sloop, those men will betray us."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CAPTIVE.

WHEN Allene saw the stage-coach roll away in the darkness, and was left alone in the gloom and solitude of the pine forest, she felt fully her desolation.

She had been buoyed up before with the desire to overtake Mark, and give him the tidings about his sloop.

She had carried out her determination, and now she was fully aware how great had been the strain upon her.

Always brave, a fearless sailor, and conscious of a certain power to take care of herself, she yet could not but feel how utterly helpless she was.

The winds sighed mournfully through the pines, the rumble of the coach-wheels died away, and a wolf far off gave forth a long-drawn howl.

But she determined not to give way to her wretched feelings, and started back home at a slow canter.

She had not gone very far before a sharp yelp was heard behind her.

Instantly she reined in her horses to a walk, for she knew well what it meant.

Some hungry wolf was on the scent.

If she appeared to fly he would pursue.

If she showed no fear of him, he would keep his distance.

So she was brave, and though her heart beat violently, she reined her horses down to a walk.

But other yelps were heard, other wolves had joined the one who just gave cry at the scent of food.

The horses were nervous and she had difficulty in holding them back.

Then came a chorus of yelps, and the horses bounded forward in terror.

She was unable to check the now frantic animals, and they bounded forward like the wind.

The wolves came in hot pursuit.

The horses needed no urging, for fears added wings to their feet, but still Allene did urge them on.

It was a cruel, hard ride, of a league, and then out of the forest they dashed, the settlements were reached, and the wolves skulked back to their retreats disappointed of their prey.

Allene was almost prostrated, with dread and exhaustion, yet still she led the horse that Chips had given her down to the stable and hitched him there.

Then she started home, congratulating herself upon her escape.

Snowflake fairly tottered with fatigue, and as she went around a corner she stumbled, could not recover herself and fell.

Allene was thrown to the ground, and became unconscious from the sudden shock, though she was not hurt.

When she recovered consciousness she was in the cabin of the Dare-Devil.

She looked about her in a bewildered way, and all was strange that she saw.

In a few moments all that had happened came to her, and she said to herself:

"I remember falling, and no more."

"Where am I?"

The companionway opened and a man entered.

"Ah, lady, you are yourself again; but do you suffer any pain from your fall?"

The cabin lamp had been lighted, and she saw before her a man of striking presence, clad in the garb of a seaman.

His face was a strange one, and yet she did not see aught therein to dread.

"Where am I, sir?"

"On board my vessel, lady where you are safe."

"What vessel, sir?"

"She is known as the Dare-Devil."

"There is a brig belonging to Merchant Patterson by that name."

"This, is the same vessel, lady."

"How came I here?"

"Your horse fell with you, and I took you up unconsciously and brought you here."

"But have no fear, for you are safe."

"Now I must leave you, for duty calls me on deck."

She tried to detain him by a word, but he was gone.

She arose to her feet and followed him to the companionway.

But it was locked.

"What does it all mean?" she cried, and throwing herself down upon a sofa she burst into tears, for after all that she had passed through she was wholly unnerved.

The brig sailed on her way down the river, the tide and wind in her favor, and at length reached the open sea.

"Which way, Captain Caspar?" asked Carl Dent, who was the first officer.

"There is an old wreck upon the coast above here; a British schooner, drove on an island at high tide and in a storm, and was wrecked."

"Her guns are still there, and I have long had my eye upon them, Dent, and now that we have the vessel to carry them, we will get them," was the reply.

"And you will head for the island, sir?"

"Yes, for the Dare-Devil now is nothing more than a buccaneer craft."

"Keep her as she now heads until further orders, and call me if any sail is sighted, for I wish to go down and see my fair captive, whom, after seeing, I am sorry I brought with me."

So saying Caspar entered the brig's cabin, for it was now broad daylight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PIRATE'S PLEDGE.

WHEN Caspar, the pirate captain, entered the cabin of the Dare-Devil, his eyes fell upon Allene, lying upon the sofa.

She had wept herself to sleep, and lay there in a graceful attitude, a smile upon her lips, whatever her thoughts might have been in her waking hours.

She looked very beautiful as she lay there, one hand supporting her face, and the pirate stood gazing upon her as upon a beautiful picture.

"Poor girl," broke involuntarily from his lips, and for a long time he stood gazing upon her, as though entranced by her beauty and innocence.

"How like her whom I love, though she is lost to me forever," he mused.

At last the earnest gaze upon her face awoke Allene, and she sprung to her feet in alarm.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Montague, for you are in no danger," he said, in a low, earnest voice.

"I remember now, I saw you last night, and you said that you had brought me on board the Dare-Devil."

"I have been asleep," she said, in a half bewildered way.

"Yes, for several hours."

"And the vessel is at sea."

"Yes, lady."

"Ah, where are you taking me, sir?" and she clasped her hands in pleading entreaty.

"Miss Montague, I—"

"You know me?"

"Yes, as Miss Allene Montague."

"Yet I have never seen you?"

"Be seated and hear what I have to say."

"Who are you?"

"I will tell you, and tell you all."

"I will listen," and she dropped listlessly into a chair.

"You ask me where I am taking you?"

"Oh, yes."

"I will tell you first that I intend to restore you to your home."

"Oh, thank you."

"But cannot do so now, for reasons you will understand when I explain all to you."

"But you shall be again at your home in a very short while."

"I wish I could go now."

"That is impossible, for it would be my death to return now to the river."

"Who are you?" she eagerly asked.

"Have you ever heard of Caspar the Freebooter?"

"Heard of that red-handed fiend?"

"Often I have."

"I am Captain Caspar."

She gave a cry of horror, rather than of terror, and shrank from him.

"Do not fear me, for I will prove to you that I am not all that men paint me."

"I told you that this vessel was Merchant Patterson's Dare-Devil, and it is, for I wanted a craft, and this one suiting me, I cut her out from her anchorage last night."

"Heaven have mercy on me!"

"You need not fear me, I again say, though your brother and I are bitter foes."

"I was driven to piracy by my own hot-headed temper, leading me to do that which I regretted afterward."

"I went to smuggling at first, then to piracy, and then your brother crossed my path at sea."

"You crossed his, rather."

"True, I wanted his vessel, and had it not been so ably defended, I would have captured it."

"I have since learned that you were on board that night, and had the helm."

"Yes; we needed the men for defense."

"The sloop was most ably defended and handled, and I was beaten off."

"Then I tried again, and once more that gallant brother of yours thwarted me—and more, captured my vessel."

"But you know all, and how at last he got my schooner, my men, and I barely escaped with one comrade, and only by a little strategy."

"And you captured his sloop last night?"

"I?"

"Yes, when she sailed out of the river."

"No; his ship sailed, leaving me in port."

"But you took her?"

"No."

"Is this the truth?"

"On my honor, yes."

"Has a pirate honor?"

"Had I not, would I return you to your home?"

"Forgive me, but the sloop was taken," and Allene told of Chips's escape, and how she had gone to warn her brother.

"Miss Montague?"

"Well, sir?"

"Believe me or not, as you will, but I swear to you I had naught to do with the capture of that sloop last night."

"I can but believe you, sir, but who was the captor?"

"That I cannot tell you; but there are more outlaws than Caspar about, it seems."

"So it would seem, sir; but do you intend to make this brig into a pirate vessel?"

"I do."

"And will try and run down my brother?"

"I will endeavor to defend myself against your brother, Miss Montague, for, in my own vessel, which is now an armed cruiser, he intends to hunt me down."

"And he will."

"This brig is larger than my old schooner, will carry a heavier armament and more men, and the Royal Middy, daring as he is, will hardly attempt to attack the Dare-Devil with the Shark."

"He has fought you with great odds against him before," said Allene with a smile.

"True, and successfully; but I will not let him drive me from the sea."

"Now, Miss Montague, let me say that when

I was told who you were, I deemed it a lucky chance for revenge to capture you."

"How have I harmed you?"

"You never have; but I decided to revenge myself upon your brother by making you my captive."

"Seeing you, I changed my mind, and felt how unmanly it would be."

"Now I tell you frankly that I am going to a secluded island on the coast, where lies the wreck of a small cruiser."

"Her guns and armament are there, and safe."

"With them I shall arm this brig, and then I shall take you to your home."

"In the mean time this cabin is at your disposal wholly."

"You shall be free from all intrusion, and if you wish to walk on deck no one shall disturb you."

"So feel comfortable, as I, though a pirate, give you my pledge to take you to your home within two weeks."

"I accept your pledge, sir, and thank you."

"One of my men is a good cook, and he will serve you with your meals, and I am only sorry our mess is not more bountifully stocked, but we had to take the brig as we found her."

So saying Caspar bowed low and left the cabin, while Allene muttered to herself, impressed by his courtly manners:

"A pirate—yet a gentleman."

"How strange that the two should be combined."

"But I feel that he will keep his pledge."

CHAPTER XXV.

A FEARFUL FATE

WHEN the schooner Fleetwing started in chase of the tiny sail, seen far off on the horizon, every stitch of canvas that would draw was put upon her.

The schooner was very fast, and went bowling along at a rate that threatened to overhaul the strange sail, if it were possible to do so.

As she held out into the sea the waves grew heavier, for a storm had been sweeping the ocean far out, and it was soon discernible that they were gaining quite rapidly.

The wind increased in strength, but Captain Montague still kept the schooner under full sail, though it was noticed that the vessel in view was forced to take in her topsail.

"It is the Sea-Cat," said Captain Montague, after a long look at the little vessel through his glass.

This information caused Merton Stanwood and Walter Patterson to look very nervous.

Captain Montague felt sorry that the vessel ahead was not the brig, on board of which was Allene, but he felt assured that the sloop had been taken also by some of Caspar's men, and so he held on in pursuit.

The Sea-Cat was a fine sea-boat, and would stand the roughest weather; but still the heavy waves now running checked her progress far more than they did the large schooner, and consequently the latter rapidly gained.

"They do not sail her as Mark could, or we would not overhaul her as swiftly as we do," remarked Captain Montague.

Later in the afternoon they were near enough to open fire, and the gun loaned by the fort was ordered to be loaded, and a shot was sent over the sloop.

Those on the little vessel still held on, however, until another shot was fired.

They then mistook the schooner for an armed cruiser, had no idea that those on board knew that they had run off with the Sea-Cat and so hove to.

In a little while the schooner ran near and hove to, while Captain Montague hailed.

"Sloop, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the schooner!"

"Send a boat aboard at once with half your men in it."

Those on board the Sea-Cat now saw their mistake, for, having been seamen knocking about the town, they recognized a number on board of the schooner, which they supposed had come after them alone.

They could offer no resistance, and so yielded with discretion, and called out:

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Permit me to take a boat and board, sir, and with men enough to man the sloop, while I can put them in irons on board," said Merton Stanwood, who had hastily conferred with Walter Patterson.

"All right, Mr. Stanwood, it is just as well," and Captain Montague, little dreaming of the young man's motive again hailed the sloop.

"I will send a boat aboard of you."

The men on the sloop stopped at once, as they

were about to lower their boat, and Captain Montague said:

"Mr. Stanwood, if you find that you can discover the whereabouts of Caspar, their chief, hail me, and we will stand away at once to find him."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Stanwood was delighted to get into his boat and be off.

"Well, men, this is a pretty mess you have gotten into, running off with the Royal Middy's sloop," said Stanwood, as he boarded, and he motioned to the man whom he had made the ringleader to follow him into the cabin.

It will be remembered by the reader, that for the safety of themselves, Stanwood, Patterson and the two seconds, had each decided to secure a man, and let their men get others.

In this way the four young men were not known to the men, excepting to one of them, and only the man he called into the cabin did Stanwood know in the matter.

Also, he alone knew Stanwood as the secret mover.

"Well, Trask, you have made a mess of it," he said.

"Yes, but we did not expect to be followed so quickly, Master Stanwood."

"It was an accident, and you can lay it to Caspar," and he explained how they had come out in chase of the pirate.

"Well, Master Stanwood, you are going to get us out of it, of course?"

"I don't see how."

"You will have to see how, as I can tell bad tales on you."

"Don't threaten, for I will do what I can, as you know."

"You must get us out of this."

"It can only be done one way."

"How is that?"

"To release you, after you are in the lock-up at home."

"Well, I don't care what way you do it, only get us out, or I'll talk, and so will the others."

"What others?"

"All of us."

"You have not told them—"

"Oh, yes, they all know, so get us out of our trouble if you wish to save yourself."

"I will; but you must go in irons now, and I will command the sloop, and think of some plan to get you free."

"All right," and the man's tone and manner were threatening.

The man then submitted to being ironed, Buntline, Charcoal, and the other released prisoners assisting with alacrity in putting manacles upon those who had thus served them.

The boat then went back to the schooner, Charcoal going in it, while two of the men remained to help work the sloop.

As the runaway crew of course disavowed any knowledge of Caspar, or being connected with him, Stanwood could only send word back to Captain Montague by Charcoal, that they had better continue on in search of the brig Dare-Devil, keeping in company.

This course the captain called back they would do, and the prisoners were ironed securely and placed in the hold, Stanwood whispering to Trask that he had decided upon a plan to save them.

The two vessels were then headed back toward the coast; but as night came on the wind increased to a gale, and the sloop labored badly.

"What's got into the craft to behave so?" said old Buntline, who was at the tiller.

"She does roll and pitch terribly," said Stanwood.

"She does indeed, sir; but just hear those devils in the hold, how they yell."

"They evidently don't like it."

"Let them yell, for they deserve their fate, the pirates, to run off with the sloop as they did."

"But, Buntline!"

"Well, sir?"

"The sloop acts as though she was going to founder."

"I don't understand it, sir, for we've had her in much worse weather, and she went like a duck."

"The cargo has shifted, perhaps."

"Maybe, sir, but we can't change it in this wild sea, for if we opened the hatches it would drown her."

"Yes, but I will go into the cabin and see if all is right in the hold, as well as I can judge from there."

Stanwood went below, and the yells from the prisoners was heart-curdling.

"The sloop has sprung a leak!"

"She is sinking!"

"The hold is full of water!"

"Save us for God's sake!"

"Save us, for the craft is sinking!"

"Mercy! Oh, God! Mercy!"

"Placing his hands over his ears, Stanwood rushed on deck.

Night had come on, and every sea swept the decks of the sloop.

"Buntline, we must signal the schooner to lay to for us, as I believe the sloop will founder."

"Ho, lads! get the life-boat ready to launch!"

The schooner was signaled and hove to, the life-boat was launched, and just in time, for loud came the cry from Stanwood:

"Quick! save yourselves! Into the life-boat, for the sloop is going down!"

The startled crew sprung to the life-boat, while old Buntline cried in a voice of agony:

"Good God! the prisoners!

"We must save them!"

"There is no time! Save yourself!"

"No, no, I cannot! I—"

"Here, don't let the old man perish; seize him!"

At the command of Stanwood two of the crew grasped old Buntline, just as he had seized an ax to cut open the hatches.

Into the life-boat they dragged him, and away it shot on the crest of a mighty wave that swept over the sloop.

Then arose the cry:

"The sloop has gone down!"

It was true, and at the sight, Merton Stanwood buried his face in his hands with a groan.

But through his shut teeth came the words, though not spoken for others to hear:

"The auger-holes did their work well."

"They will not tell their story to my ruin."

Half an hour after when on board the schooner the murderer was telling the awful story of the sloop's having sprung a leak that sent her down before help could be given to the poor wretches in irons below her decks.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN CASPAR'S STRATEGY.

HAD the schooner Fleetwing held on down the coast, instead of going in chase of the little sloop Sea-Cat, that met with such a sad fate at the cruel hands of Merton Stanwood, she would have sighted the brig Dare-Devil, which had headed in among a group of islands.

Arriving at the island which he sought, and where he knew the wreck of the cruiser to be, he decided suddenly upon carrying out a little plan that had flashed into his busy brain.

He ran near the island, anchored, and then went ashore in his boat.

The tide had been remarkably high, at the time that the cruiser had been wrecked there, for it had been driven over a reef directly into a place, which at low tide was high and dry.

With her bottom knocked out, her masts gone and many of her crew lost, the survivors had been glad to escape the next day in their boats, leaving the wreck.

It was by accident that Captain Caspar had found it there, landing one day from his vessel to hunt for deer on the island.

He did not make his discovery known, but upon inquiry learned that a vessel-of-war was said to have gone to pieces among those islands a couple of years before.

As there were no dwellers near upon the coast the wreck had not been found, and Caspar had kept his secret for his own use some day in the future.

Now visiting the island he saw that the wreck lay so high that only the highest tide, and in a storm, would the water reach it.

The guns were all good ones, and below decks the firearms, cutlasses and ammunition had not been harmed, so that he had just what he wanted to arm the brig with.

To get the guns he knew would take more time, for a platform would have to be placed in position, with marine gang-planks leading to the ground, and then a road cut to the water's edge, at a point where the depth was sufficient for the brig to lay alongside of a rock, as though at her wharf.

To do this, Caspar decided to leave a dozen men on the island, and have them go to work, while he sailed with the balance in the brig for Boston, or its vicinity.

"I have nearly half a hundred brave fellows lying in prison in Boston, awaiting their trial for piracy, and some of them will hang I know," he said to Carl Dent.

"How can you prevent it?"

"Well, I think I can arrange a plan to set them free."

"Impossible."

"Dent, you have used that word to me before,

and discovered that it was possible for me to do many things you deemed impossible.

"Now I have on the brig, including ourselves, just twenty-two men.

"I will leave twelve of them here to do the work necessary to get the guns on yonder rock, from whence we can roll them upon our deck."

"This will give me eight for a crew."

"Now, the wind is favorable for a rapid run to Boston, and I shall go there, or if delayed, will catch a fishing-smack outside, and let the Dare-Devil await me, for I do not care to get her caught."

"I have a little plan that will, I think, get my men out of prison, and they, with the score I have, will give me between sixty and seventy in crew, just the number I need."

"Now what do you think of my plan?"

"I think that you are about as daring as that mad middy, Mark Montague, for he will attempt anything and I believe you will too."

Captain Caspar laughed and said:

"I wish it was so that the mad middy and I could work together, Dent."

"But come, let us get the men ashore, with all the provisions we can spare, and then we'll head for Boston."

Thus it was that while the schooner was in chase of the sloop, the brig slipped out from among the islands, after leaving a part of her crew there, and set all sail for Boston, flying along at a pace that proved she possessed remarkable speed and gladdened the heart of her pirate commander.

Logging a dozen miles to the hour, and keeping up the average, the Dare-Devil was not very long in sighting the lights of Boston, and feeling assured that he could not have been reported as having run off with the brig, the bold outlaw decided to run fearlessly into port professing to be a merchantman.

This he did do, anchoring before dawn not very far from the tavern where he and Dent had sought shelter the night of their escape from on board the sloop Sea-Cat.

To leave orders that his fair prisoner was to be closely watched, and not allowed to leave the cabin, was the work of an instant, and then Caspar went ashore and roused up once more his old tavern friend.

"Come, landlord, I have a vessel in port, and I wish to purchase stores at once, and I know you can get anything in an emergency, and this is one."

"Send down stores enough for a three months' cruise, and put them on board the prettiest brig you ever saw, that lies off the Red Wharf."

"Do you understand, old mate?"

"I do, Captain Caspar, and it shall be as you say."

"You might get me half a dozen good men and send them on board too, though I am now going to see about getting my old crew out of limbo."

"Getting them out?" asked the astonished tavern-keeper.

"Yes."

"It can't be done."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Well, I differ with you and night will show who is right."

"Now I want a good disguise, and then I will go out to look over the field."

"But any news?"

"Well, the Shark, turned into a British cruiser, sailed yesterday in chase of you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Any other news, for I passed her at sea before I came in?"

"You did?"

"Yes, any other news?"

"You are to be hanged if caught."

"That's an old story, and so would you be, if you were known as you are, you old rascal."

"Ah, captain, don't talk so."

Caspar then laughed and then asked:

"Do you know any soldiers?"

"Yes, a few."

"What regiment is at the navy yard as a guard now?"

"The marines, you know."

"True; well perhaps I may wish you to get me an officer's uniform, and also the uniforms for a dozen marines."

"Can you do it?"

"I have them."

"Always prepared."

"I buy up old uniforms you know, captain, and have them in my storehouse."

"Well, I expect to need them."

"Now give me the disguise and I will be off."

An hour after no one that had ever seen Cas-

par the Corsair would have recognized the famous pirate in the Quaker who had left his retreat in the tavern, and sauntered along the street, gazing curiously at all he saw, through the large spectacles he wore, and presented the appearance of one not well acquainted with the ways of the town.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FREEBOOTERS' PLOT.

"WELL, captain, have you made any discovery?" asked the innkeeper, as late in the afternoon Caspar returned to his quarters, and sinking into a chair resumed his Quaker hat and his spectacles.

"Yes."

"Who was right?"

"About what?"

"The prisoners."

"I was. I can release them?"

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"You'll believe it to-morrow."

The innkeeper laughed incredulously.

"I see you doubt me."

"I know you are a wonderful man for plots and escapes, Caspar, but how you can release half a hundred men from the prison in town here, I cannot see."

"Will not this do it?"

The landlord took an official document held out to him and read:

"NAVAL HEADQUARTERS,
H. B. M. COLONY OF MASS.
October 2d, 17—"

"To LIEUT. DUDLEY ROSS, COUNTY PRISON:—

"SIR:—It having come to my knowledge that an attempt may be made to free the pirate prisoners now in your keeping, I desire that they shall be removed to the fort on the island in the harbor, where they will be secure, and for that purpose I send an officer and marines as a guard."

"Be sure and have the prisoners ironed two by two, and the officer who bears this will receipt to you for them."

Respectfully,

"RUTLEDGE,
Commodore Commanding Port."

"Captain Caspar, how did you get this paper?" asked the amazed landlord.

"Wrote it of course."

"But the signature is genuine, for I know it."

"I wrote it, though."

"This will do it."

"I told you so."

"But the officer and marines?"

"I will be the officer, and you are to furnish the men and uniforms."

"When?"

"I leave at eleven o'clock."

"But how will you get them to your vessel?"

"I forged an order and sent it for two Government barges, and they are ready now at the wharf."

"The men will march down to the wharf, get into the barges, and row down the harbor toward the fort."

"The Dare Devil will get under way, follow the boats, pick up the men and go to sea."

"Do you understand?"

"I do, and I now believe you will carry it out."

"Of course I shall," was the reply, with a reckless laugh.

Then he added:

"How about the stores?"

"They are all on board."

"Good! now get out one of the best dinners you can furnish me, for I am hungry, and I wish a bottle of your choicest wine."

"You shall have the best, for you deserve it," was the reply.

The dinner was brought and enjoyed, and then the men procured by the landlord, were ushered into the room, rigged up in their uniforms, and put through a drill, for Caspar wished to make no mistake.

All of them had been soldiers, and it was therefore not difficult to make them understand what was wanted of them.

At the appointed time the pirate captain, Mark, in his uniform as a lieutenant, and bearing the forged paper, pretending to come from Commodore Rutledge, marched his bogus soldiers out of the tavern by a secret door, leading into an alley, and then led them in the direction of the prison.

The streets were comparatively deserted, and a body of soldiers moving along at any time seldom created any stir, so they were hardly noticed by the few wayfarers that they passed.

The prison gate was soon reached, the supposed lieutenant and his men were admitted, and the officer in command being absent, his next in rank read the paper and said that it was

"All right."

Then the wards of the prison were opened, and the buccaneer crew were marched out, two by two, and as they appeared, were ironed securely.

The pirate captain placed his men about them as a guard, and taking the head of the column himself moved out of the prison yard.

The most unfrequented streets were taken, and without a halt the men reached the wharf, and there the two large barges were found in waiting.

Into them the prisoners were ordered, the marines followed, and the boats pulled away.

Once well out of the shipping the order was given:

"Way 'nough!"

Then the oarsmen lay on their oars, and the barges drifted with the tide.

"There she comes," at last said Captain Caspar, as he beheld the brig coming down toward them.

It was a glad moment for him, for he was beginning to grow anxious.

Soon she drew near, sail was shortened, and without her coming to, the men in the barges boarded.

The two boats were cast adrift, and when the prisoners learned that their bold chief it was who had freed them, they could hardly resist breaking forth in one wild halloo.

Sail was crowded at once on the brig, and she went past the fort and out into the open sea.

Hardly had she gained an offing, when rockets went up from the town and in the fort, and there seemed to be a general alarm resounding.

"You are too late," quietly said Captain Caspar, and turning, he beheld his fair prisoner by his side, and she said, earnestly:

"You are a brave man to do what you have done this night; but, oh! that you would give up piracy, and let your courage win for you a name of honor."

"It is too late now," was the bitter response, and turning to Carl Dent he called out:

"To the island for our guns now, Mr. Dent, and once they are on this deck the Dare-Devil need fear no foe."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT LAST.

In searching for the brig, Captain Montague knew not which way to go, but decided to run down toward Boston.

Running into Boston, Captain Montague discovered that Mark had gotten there after a hard drive, and had at once put out to sea in the Shark, in chase of his sloop, not of course knowing of the capture of his sister.

To his deep chagrin Captain Montague also learned of the coming into port of the Dare-Devil, and the rescue of his crew by the daring pirate chief.

Hardly had the Dare-Devil begun her flight when Commodore Rutledge happened to stop at the prison, and there learned what had been done.

He pronounced the paper a forgery, yet admitted it a most clever one.

An alarm was at once sent out, and hardly had it been done, when the messenger from the Kennebec arrived with the news that the Dare-Devil had been cut out of the river by Captain Caspar, and the beautiful sister of the Royal Middy carried off.

After an interview with Commodore Rutledge, Captain Montague again put to sea, anxious to find the Shark, and let Mark know all that had happened.

He wished the young midshipman to understand all that had been done, by the man who so persistently hunted him.

Cruising along the coast, the second day after leaving Boston, the lookout on the Fleetwing shouted:

"Sail, ho!"

The stranger was soon seen from the deck, and Buntline at once pronounced it to be the Shark.

The strange sail was already heading toward the Fleetwing, and as they drew nearer it was seen to be surely the Shark.

An hour more, and Mark Montague was in the cabin of the Fleetwing, engaged in earnest conversation with his father.

The fact that Captain Caspar had captured his beautiful sister, was a bitter blow to Mark, and he vowed to hunt him down.

"You return, father, with the schooner, and let me have Buntline and the others from my poor little Sea-Cat."

"You are not able to be at sea, and I will hunt this pirate down, mark my words."

"I might get a few men from you, to make my crew reach half a hundred, and then I will

not fear him, even if he be armed, though how he can arm the brig I do not see."

Thus it was decided, and the Fleetwing put back for the Kennebec, while the Shark held on down the coast in search of the Dare-Devil, for a small coaster had reported seeing a swift-sailing brig running along the coast the day before.

Another coaster was hailed, one from out of the Penobscot, and reported seeing a brig run in among the islands, at a certain point on the coast.

So the Shark's course was laid for the islands, and arriving off-shore, the brig was suddenly sighted.

The men of the schooner fairly sprung to their guns, and in an instant the brig was in flight.

"There is something wrong on board!" cried Mark, and he went aloft with his glass.

"They have their decks lumbered with heavy guns, and are trying to mount them as they run!" he called out.

The Shark was now fairly bounding forward, under pressure of the canvas above her decks, and she was gaining, too, on the brig.

The wind was off-shore, and the brig did not get the breeze, being closer in under the land, as did the little schooner.

Though within easy range, Mark would not allow the gunners to open fire, for he feared that he might harm his sister.

Never had those who knew him seen him so deadly in earnest, for his brow was as black as thunder-cloud.

Nearer and nearer drew the schooner to the brig, the latter trying to get out to sea, if possible, while her crew worked hard to mount the guns, which had been taken on the decks only a few hours before.

But the schooner was splendidly handled, and at last, unable to mount her guns, or escape, the brig put about and headed toward the Shark.

"Boarders ho! he intends to fight it out at close quarters," cried Mark.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels came, then, by a skillful maneuver, Mark got the advantage, and, as his vessel was gliding up alongside of the brig, he shouted:

"Fire!"

Every man on the schooner emptied his musket, or pistol, at close range, for the young middy would not use his heavy guns, and the next instant the two beautiful vessels came together.

Grapnels were thrown and then Mark and his crew boarded.

Their onslaught was irresistible, and the pirates, hard hit by the volley from the schooner, was beaten back and soon cried for quarter, for their leader had been among the first to fall, shot through the body, and this time there was no shamming, for he said calmly:

"You have won, Midshipman Montague."

"I have hunted you hard, and now you have hunted me down."

"In the cabin you will find your sister, and she will tell you that, though I am Caspar the Freebooter, I can also be a man of honor."

CONCLUSION.

THE Hunted Midshipman, for outside of Caspar the Corsair, other foes seemed to hunt him down, was happy over his well-earned victory, and doubly so at the rescue of his beautiful sister.

His crew had suffered some, though not near so much as had the pirates, and the two vessels were soon on their way to the Kennebec.

It was daylight when they passed in, the Shark leading, and the fort gave the gallant middy a salute.

Arriving at the town, the people turned out en masse, and old Merchant Patterson, at sight of his brig unharmed, was so delighted that he grasped the hand of the young middy and said:

"I forgive you, my boy, and if we have war with the Colonies, and you want a privateer, the brig is at your service to command."

Of course there were those who were not happy over the greater triumph of Mark Montague, and among these were Merton Stanwood and Walter Patterson.

But they said nothing to others, and with the dark secret he carried in his heart, Merton Stanwood was content to keep aloof from his fellow-man, though he still vowed to some day win Allene for his wife, while his pretty little sister Lola said one day:

"When I grow up I wonder if I will be the wife of Mark Montague, the gallant young Sea Ranger?"

THE END.

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